

DETECTIVE WEEKLY

Starring Sexton Blake

2^D

METROPOLITAN POLICE

**MURDER
WANTED**



TINKER

CHIEF DETECTIVE OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE
W. L. BAKER

WANTED!

**TINKER, Sexton Blake's
Assistant, Wanted for MURDER!**

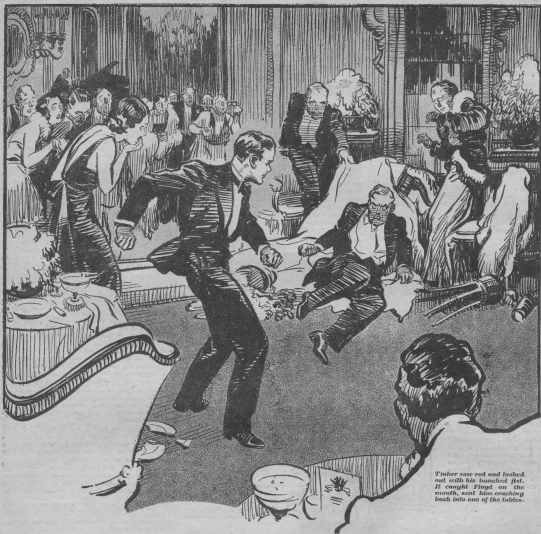
Read inside the baffling murder case which nearly parted the famous pair of Baker Street.

A Complete Story that Will Hold You by its Compelling Human Interest and Brilliant Detective Work.



"What we have got to decide," he said, "is how Blott got on to the 2nd floor, and what part the life played in the case. It is obvious to assume that the body was thrown from the 2nd floor, although on the face of it there was no point in doing so."

From that point Blake proceeded to elucidate the whole crime. *Could you have solved it, had you been in his place? Have a shot—and then check your deductions with the correct solution on page 32.*



Tinker was red and fashed out with his bunched fist. He caught Floyd on the mouth, sent him crouching back into one of the tables.

WANTED!

By Mark Osborne

Tinker Goes Alone.

SEXTON BLAKE finished making an entry in one of his many reference books as the door of the consulting-room opened at his back.

The famous criminologist blotted out what he had written. Then he spoke without turning in his chair.

"Care to have a stroll to the club and a game of billiards, young 'un?" he asked. "I've not seen you handle a cue for ages."

There was no reply.

Tinker, his young assistant, who had just entered the room, stood looking a little awkward, almost embarrassed. He had just come from his bed-room, and under his slipcoat, was in well-cut dinner clothes.

Sexton Blake closed the reference book, rose, and turned.

His eyes caught the gleam of the white shirt-front under the overcoat Tinker was buttoning. A little frown knitted his brow. But it was quickly gone.

"A show you've forgotten to tell me about?" he inquired good-naturedly. "Or a dinner?"

Rather hurriedly, Tinker pushed away the great bloodhound, Pedro. The dog had risen from the hearthrug after a noisy thumping of his tail upon the floor, and was attempting to jump on him.

Tinker's action was not unreasonable. Pedro's paws were still wet and muddy from a walk with Blake. But the hound did not understand Tinker's objections to his show of affection, and his faithful eyes were surprised and reproachful at the unexpected rebuff.

"I"—Tinker was, flushing a little, and now

plainly confused—"I've an engagement to dine with a friend, guv'nor. Some other night I'll be only too pleased to come along," he added hastily.

"That's all right, Tinker," Blake rejoined. "What about to-morrow evening, by the way. I rather want to see that amical show at Drury Lane."

Tinker suddenly avoided Blake's eyes.

"I'm awfully sorry, guv'nor," he said, and every word seemed dragged from him. "I've fixed up for to-morrow, too. We've—be moistened his lips—"we never seem to get out together these days, do we?"

"No," said Blake, and could have pointed out that the fault was not his. "Never mind, Tinker. Run along and enjoy yourself."

Tinker put on his hat. He took up a slender gold cigarette-case, for which he had come to the consulting-room, and turned back towards the door.

There he paused, however, and seemed reluctant to leave Blake, who had turned to the mantelpiece to reach for the tobacco-jar.

"I hate to leave you on your lonesome, guv'nor!" he muttered uncomfortably. "I—"

"Nonsense!" cut in Blake, over his shoulder. "Slip away, or you'll be keeping your friend waiting."

Tinker gave a slight start. He had not missed the significant little pause before the word "friend." He crimsoned, stared rather wistfully at Blake's back for a moment, then quitted the room.

Plugging the tobacco down into the pipe he had been lighting, Sexton Blake sank into his favourite easy chair beside the fire, and there was no question as to his frowning now.

As he listened to the closing of the street door behind the young fellow who had been his assistant and constant companion since he was a mere boy, Blake shook his head with a touch of unwanted sadness. He looked worried, a little hurt—vaguely anxious. He seemed to have forgotten the pipe he held, for he made no attempt to light it or to raise it to his lips.

For fully a minute, Sexton Blake sat thinking. And his thoughts were of Tinker and the queer change that had come over him of late.

On almost every free night, the young detective had mysteriously absented himself, usually dressing in evening wear with meticulous care before he went. To do this, Tinker had repeatedly made excuses to avoid going to theatres or other places of amusement with Blake, as they had been accustomed to do for years past whenever it was possible to take a night off.

When these spells of leisure and enjoyment together abruptly ceased, Blake realized to the full how pleasant they had been. He felt the break in their companionship far more keenly than he had allowed Tinker to see.

The famous detective realized that there was a weight on his knee, and glanced down abstractedly. Pedro was resting his muzzle there and looking up into his troubled face in sympathetic understanding.

Blake forced a smile. He thrust his pipe between his teeth and affectionately pulled the big fellow's huge ears.

"I'll bet it's a girl, Pedro," Blake said with a smile—but he looked vaguely troubled.

"Why the deuce hasn't he come to me with her photo, say, after with enthusiasm, and told me all about her—as a son would tell a father?" he demanded. "Hang it all, Pedro, it's so unlike him to be secretive, you know."

"Won't?" remarked Pedro, as though he quite followed the argument and fully agreed.

Blake patted him, rose, and lit the neglected pipe.

"I'd best go out, or I shall get the blues!" he muttered. "A stroll to the club will do good."

It was theatre-time when he reached Piccadilly. Private cars and taxis were added to the usual busy traffic, forming a crawling, congested mass. There was the inevitable black, and Blake found himself marooned on the island with several other pedestrians.

At length, the sluggish stream of vehicles began slowly to move forward.

A taxicab was brought for an instant abreast of Blake. His rather pale, clever face abruptly hardened on his catching sight of its occupants.

They were three in number; a man, a woman, and a young girl, all in evening attire and looking as if they were going to dine at one of the fashionable West End restaurants or heading for a theatre.

The man was tall, clean-shaved, and immaculately groomed. He was swarthy of skin, and his chin-thipped mouth had a habit of arduous smile. Through a gold-rimmed monocle he surveyed Blake without the flicker of an eyelid, though the detective (he realised with inward amusement) had been the means of sending him to Dartmoor for five years.

Julian Haynes' one taste of penal servitude for fraud had made him more careful—and more dangerous.

No longer did he and his wife, Miriam, live by swindling. Their racket was far less ostentatious, and a thousand times more careful. Mixed up with a notorious dope organisation, they acted as "go-betweens" from the wholesalers to the peddlars, and, on occasions, were blackmailers as a sideline.

Blake knew it. The official police knew it. But the couple were infinitely wily, and so far there was not a shred of evidence upon which their arrest could be effected.

Miriam Haynes was dark-haired and handsome. She was possibly forty-five, but looked scarcely more than thirty.

Her skillfully camouflaged face was a half-mocking, half-challenging smile as her eyes met those of Blake. But he no more than glanced at her; it was the third member of the trio who interested him—the girl.

Through one of his official acquaintances at Scotland Yard—Detective-Inspector Martin—Blake knew that she called herself Estelle Morrow.

Though, again, nothing could be proved against her, she had been seen with the Hayneses for the past few weeks, and there seemed little doubt that she was woman in their sinister

aiding the man and woman in their sinister traffic and schemes. She was possibly very young to be hand-in-glove with such pestiferous criminals, Blake thought. Also, she was undeniably beautiful.

Not much over twenty, she was slender and graceful, with raven black hair, dark-lashed eyes, and rather a grave expression, which, somehow, suited her and added to the charm and personality that had the power to make her doubly dangerous as a crook.

In the prevailing fashion, her lips owed some of the soft redness to lipstick. That, however, was the only touch of make-up in her small, oval face, and even that was really unnecessary. Nature had given Estelle Morrow a complexion and features needing no artificial beautifying.

The three were carried from view as the cab moved on. Sexton Blake might have dismissed them from his mind and gone on to the club for a whisky-and-soda but for the fact that a disengaged taxi came crawling after the one with the blackmailers and the girl.

Sexton Blake shot out his hand, opened the door, and swung himself in.

"Follow the cab in front!" he instructed the driver through the speaking-tube.

It was done passively, on impulse, partly because Blake had been bored by the club purely to try to forget the little robe that Tinker's abandoning of him always brought.

There was one type of criminal Sexton Blake loathed more than others, it was the blackmailers. He would never lose a chance, however slender, to bring such pests to justice.

Who knew? he mused, as he settled back in the cab. By this unpremeditated shadowing of the Hayneses, he might witness something that would enable him to get a line on some exploit for which they could be arrested and charged at last. If Estelle Morrow was involved, she could be dealt with, too, and a recruit to the diabolical game given a lesson that would be all the better for her.

Blake had hardly leaned back when the cab jerked to a halt alongside the kerb. He looked from the window and discovered that he was outside the restaurant of one of the fashionable hotels, the Majestic.

The detective lingered in the cab, which, unlike that of his quarry, was not illuminated. From it he watched Julian Haynes, his wife, and the Morrow puss into the hotel.

Blake's driver was a silent, steady fellow. He waited until the trio had disappeared before he got down and opened the door.

"Didn't have to take you far, sir," he said, eyeing Blake with some curiosity.

The detective's silent speculations—by slipping a ten-shilling note into his hand and turning away without waiting for change.

Blake stood thoughtfully regarding the entrance to the hotel for several moments. Then he approached and the uniformed commissionaire swung round the door wide for him to enter.

Music floated to Blake's ears. He left his overcoat and hat at the cloak-room counter, sauntered to the head of the short staircase leading down into the sumptuous white-and-gold restaurant.

The fashionable resort was crowded. Nearly every table, with its assortment of silver, cut-glass, and exquisite flowers, was engaged, though many of the men and women who had been dining were now dancing.

Blake's quick eyes located Julian Haynes and his wife at a small table in a window recess. A waiter was stooping solicitously forward and apparently offering suggestions from a menu he held.

Sexton Blake frowned. Estelle Morrow was no longer with the couple; there was room only for two persons at the table. What had become of the girl?

The detective descended the steps. He was received with a welcoming smile from Louis, the head-waiter himself, who knew him well.

It was not until the detective was seated at a table in an alcove, further removed from the orchestra and had given his order that he saw the girl.

Thus Blake's finger and thumb closed so hard on the table that a wineglass with which he was idly toying that it all but snapped.

Her wrap was removed, so that a graceful evening gown of red maroon was now visible, and the fastened lights gleamed upon her slender bare shoulders. It was, indeed, Estelle Morrow, and as another alcove directly opposite Blake's the far of the room.

And with her was Tinker!

He was leaning over the table towards her, and his hand was closed over one of hers. The girl was smiling into Tinker's face with a touch of charming and provoking coquetry. Even from the distance Sexton Blake could sense that there was a more than casual regard in the young detective's every look and gesture.



On the face of it, at least, Tinker was hopelessly in love with her—the girl who was the associate of drug-traffickers and blackmailers.

UNTIL

UNTIL this moment, Sexton Blake had believed that he was immune from any very unsettling emotion, and from incapacity of belief that he was. Now he had to realize that he was very human, after all.

Astonishment; such incredulity that he felt that he wanted to stare and stare to make certain his eyes were not playing him a trick; concern for the young fellow he regarded almost as a son; and an all-consuming anger against the Haynes sarged through him in quick succession.

Straight Talking

For surely the Haynes had something to do with this alarming and impossible position!

They had doubtless seduced for the girl to come to know Tinker and to ensure him. Some deep-laid and criminal conspiracy was behind it all. Something, perhaps, to do with Tinker's position as Blake's assistant and his experience in the world of crime.

"The young fool!" Blake murmured, under his breath. "Is it possible that he doesn't know his associates?"

Two under-waiters began to serve him, while Louis hovered benignly in the background to ensure Blake having every satisfaction.

But the detective had lost his appetite for food. He made little more than a pretence of eating the various courses, though he drank some wine.

Blake could still hardly believe his eyes as he watched Tinker and the girl dining together, and noted how the young fellow anticipated her every want, blind to his surroundings, and certainly oblivious of his own presence in the place.

Presently they arose and danced. It was a slow foxtrot, and they glided quite close to the floor where Blake sat uselessly watching them still without Tinker having the least idea that he was watching him.

Tinker had eyes only for the smiling, upturned face of the girl he held in his arms. If Blake had possessed any doubts before as to how his assistant felt towards her, he certainly had none now.

Blake's expression grew more and more grim. Confound it, she was decidedly pretty! He had to admit that to himself. If Tinker had had had thrown into his eyes as to her standing and character, he could not blame him for letting his head be turned.

What ghastly twist of fate had made this happen? Why did this girl have to be so beautiful? He asked himself bitterly. How glad he would have been to lose the equivalent of a son and gain a daughter, as the old saying went, had she been any ordinary, decent girl.

As things stood, it could not be! It was going to be difficult. But Tinker's eyes would have to be opened, and he would have to be made to see as he saw.

The foxtrot ended. Blake saw Tinker and Estelle laughing and chatting together, as for a moment they joined in the subdued applause in acknowledgement of the orchestra's efforts.

Tinker escorted the girl back to the table. There was a lull in the music, and Estelle leaned forward suddenly and said something to her companion.

Tinker smiled and nodded. Rising, he went over to the orchestra, and for a moment was in conversation with the conductor who was giving a discreet change hands. He guessed that Estelle had asked for some special item to be played.

Meanwhile, something was causing other diners to turn their heads and stare curiously what was taking place at Estelle's table.

A clean-shaven man, slightly greying at the

temples, who had been dining alone, had risen and approached the girl. His dress shirt was just a trifle crumpled and his gait perhaps a little unsteady, though it was hardly perceptible.

Blake's brows came together as he watched. For he not only knew the man, but saw that he had been drinking too much.

He was a Dr. Arnold Floyd. Some years back there had been a scandal over some kind of medical malpractice. Though not struck off the register, he had not since practised, and was something of a mystery.

In these days he led the life of a man-about-town, and always appeared well supplied with money. Where that money came from nobody seemed to know. He dabbled in research work of some obscure character, but there was an evidence of this bringing him any income.

"My late secretary," he said, and there was a sneer in the cynical eyes fixed upon her. "May I have this wait, Miss Morrow?"

Blake was, of course, too far away to overhear. He could, however, imagine the purport of Floyd's words. He watched with interest. The orchestra had begun to play the piece for which Estelle had asked through Tinker, and the couple were again talking the floor.

"I do not care to dance with you, Dr. Floyd," Estelle's eyes and the tilt of her head conveyed the words almost as if Blake had heard them. Tinker was then on his way back to the table.

With the obstinacy of the half-intoxicated, the medico appeared to take excessive resentment at her refusal. Not knowing that the girl's escort was close behind him, he leaned down towards her, his face going red.

"For a cheap little thief whom I had to discharge for attempting to rob my safe you seem rather particular!" he retorted thickly.

Tinker, who was the whole, uttered a sharp cry of astonishment and indignation, seized the doctor by the shoulder, and swung him round so that they faced one another.

"You'll take that back!" he said, his face very white.

"Indeed?" Floyd was just drunk enough to miss the danger signal in Tinker's blazing eyes. "Who the devil are you, anyway? And why should I take it back when it's true?"

He smiled a twisted and tantalizing smile.

"This is what I said Tinker see red. He forgot where he was—forgot everything, save that this man had gone out of his way to insult Estelle."

"You rat!" he rapped, and lashed out with his bunched fist.

It caught Dr. Arnold Floyd full in the mouth. He went reeling back, brought up short by a table where an elderly couple were dining. There he went down with a crash, clutching at the tablecloth and bringing silver, cutlery, china, glass, and hostesses flowers showering about him and on the floor.

In a flash, the great restaurant was in confusion. A woman screamed. For the moment the members of the orchestra even ceased to play in sheer surprise.

The doctor's complex halted and stared unbelievably in the direction of the disturbance.

Men and women sprang up from their tables. Waiters lost their usual dignified and silent-flowed effacement, and rushed riotously across the floor.

Dr. Floyd scrambled up, a little trickle of blood running down his chin. Livid with rage, he made a spring for Tinker.

"You young hound! You're going to pay for

But waiters clung to him. Others thrust

themselves between the late antagonists and did their best to pacify the semi-intoxicated and shouting doctor.

He struggled in blind fury to reach the impudent young rascal who had knocked him down. The struggle was soon over. Such a thing could not possibly be allowed to continue inside the smooth-running Majestic. He was discreetly hustled through the nearest exit, shouting.

"If you don't believe what I said about her, come and see me and I'll convince you!" he bawled, as a parting shot. "No. 5, Eccleston Road, Kensington!"

Sexton Blake heard much of the latter part of the quarrel where he sat on the far side of the room. It was said loudly enough, in all conscience. He glanced towards Julia and Miriam Haynes, who both looked concerned, but her husband wore a faint smile of amusement as he gazed on the scene through his supercilious monocle.

Estelle was ashen pale. She said something to

Tinker, and almost at once Blake remained for a while; then he, too, settled his bill and did the same.

He had now lost interest in the immediate doings of the Haynes, feeling instead that he must have matters out with Tinker as soon as he returned home. He expected a long wait, but at Baker Street he had hardly changed his coat and vest for his somewhat old and faded dressing-gown and sunk into his chair with a pipe when he heard the click of his assistant's latchkey.

"I wonder just how many years ago it is, Tinker, since I taught you how to make head use of a latchkey?" Blake murmured, leaning an eye at him over his pipe as he entered the consulting-room, looking worried and preoccupied.

Tinker almost jumped. "You—you weren't at the Majestic to-night?" he breathed, realising the situation at once.

"I must certainly was, young fellow," said Blake, rising and laying his pipe on the mantelpiece. "I take it Dr. Arnold Floyd said something that was not exactly pleasant to your companion, and he paid for it and then there."

"He did insult Estelle—Miss Morrow," said Tinker, nodding. "I was sorry to create a scene as I did, but he asked for it—and he got it."

"Exactly," returned Blake quietly. "The pity of it is that he possibly did not merit your treatment of him."

Tinker started, and stared at him. The colour began to mount angrily in his cheeks.

"I don't quite get the strength of that remark," he said sharply.

"Look here, Tinker, you've got to keep calm and listen to some straight talking from me, as you would if I were your father," the detective said. "You will remember that I've filled this position for a very long time where you are concerned, though, of course, there is no actual relationship between us."

Tinker's expression instantly softened.

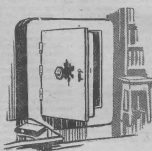
"You bet you have, guardian," he answered, and there was affection in his eyes and voice. "But, curse it all, you speak just now as though Estelle might not be all a girl should be; as if you thought that waster had a right to call her a thief. That's what he did say!" he added hotly.

"It's very likely true," said Blake, looking the lad in the eyes.

There was an instant's dumbfounded silence.

He felt that it was almost brutal, as he saw Tinker pale. But nothing was to be gained by missing words or beating about the bush.

Tinker's hands clenched. He sucked in a



hissing breath. His eyes blazing, he actually took a menacing step towards Blake. The latter knew that had he been anybody save Tinker's beloved chief and confidant, he would have hurled himself at him in a white-hot, lashing attack.

"Out it out!" he panted, and his voice was hoarse and shaking. "Do you hear me, guv'nor? I tell you to cut it out. You don't know what you're saying!"

Until now Sexton Blake had been standing with an arm resting on the mantelpiece, eyeing him impetuously. Suddenly he threw all calm aside and gripped his assistant by the shoulders in a hold that hurt.

"You blind, hot-headed young idiot, you are going to listen to me!" he said.

"I won't listen to a word you say if it's anything against her!" Tinker cried, struggling to free himself, but vainly.

"You'll hear me out, because it's for your own good!" persisted Blake. "You call the girl you were with to-night Estelle Morrow. That may or may not be her name. But, whoever she is, she—"

"Stop, please!" Tinker cried. "Don't you see that—that you might make me do something for which I'd never forgive myself? She's the sweetest girl in the house. She—"

"She has been under police surveillance for some weeks," snapped Blake, "and the reason is she has been running round with a pair of notorious blackmailers and dope traffickers." "It's a lie—a dirty, contemptible lie!" Tinker shouted.

He went white as the words left his lips, for he saw the dark expression that crept into Blake's eyes, and it was plain that he instantly regretted the outburst.

Sexton Blake looked at him for a long moment. Then he let his hands drop from the young fellow's shoulders and spread away. "Very well. If you feel that way about it, Tinker, I'll leave you to be disillusioned later," Blake said, very quietly.

"What the devil's the matter?"

BOTH started. They had not dreamed they had a witness to their first serious quarrel.

Burly, red-faced, and with his old felt hat cocked at an angle over his left eye in the way that was a long-standing habit, Detective-Inspector Martin stood in the doorway.

"Hallo, Martin?" said Blake pointedly. "I didn't hear you knock."

"I didn't," the C.I.D. man answered, in his most cocksure tone. "Your housekeeper, Mrs. Hardell, was just opening the front door to go out as I arrived."

He rubbed at his chin and looked uncomfortable.

"Just looked in as I saw the light, as I was passing," he jerked. "I'll beat it if I've happened along at an inopportune moment."

"No, don't do that," said Tinker, who was still pale and agitated. "I'm going out again, anyway."

He thrust past the surprised and now troubled-looking official. After a short delay, Blake and Martin heard the front door slam behind him.

Sexton Blake was showing more emotion than Martin had believed possible. He avoided the Scotland Yard man's questioning eyes and sank down in his easy chair. He sat there for some moments in moody silence, while Martin stared at him and fidgeted in embarrassment.

The acquaintance between the private detective of Baker Street and the somewhat short-tempered, bulldog police officer is plain clothes of the Yard dated back several years. They had at all times been on a basis of mutual friendliness, except for a period at the time when Blake's brother Nigel had been causing trouble, and Martin had become distinctly hostile on account of a realisation of duty. He had felt himself to be right in his suspicion against Blake—a feeling which was in a way justified by results. But, meantime, Sexton Blake had forgiven him what was now past.

Martin was often pigheaded and inclined to coast at Blake's theorising, ignoring the fact that, nine times out of ten, it turned out right.

But Blake understood him, and on the occasions when one of his cases brought him into contact with the Yard man he knew how to handle him.

Inspector Martin walked forward and dropped a huge and powerful hand to Blake's shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked gruffly. "I can hardly credit it, but you and Tinker were having a red-hot shindy, weren't you?"

Blake slowly nodded. "Perhaps he felt he needed a confidant. He told Inspector Martin everything, little dreaming that even at that moment things were happening which were yet to make him bitterly repeat those disclosures."

"Estelle Morrow, eh?" jerked Martin, when he had finished. "There's nothing really against her, so far. She must be a pretty bad egg, though, to run with the Hoyases. Awkward—very. What are you going to do about it, Blake?"

"I don't know—yet," replied Blake. "The young ass is apparently in love with her, and he's past the stage when I can forbid him to do as he likes outside our walls. Martin, you've kept track of her for some time. Do you know how Dr. Floyd comes to know her?"

"The fellow Tinker knocked down in the Majestic?" Martin mused. "No. He's not dropped yet, as the Yard's shadowing of the girl, I know of. And, by the way, Dr. Arnold Floyd is a gentleman I would give something to know more about—how he manages to live at the rate of five thousand or more a year and where does the money come from?"

Sexton Blake rose with an impatient shrug. "Let's forget these undesirable people for a bit, Martin," he growled. "It's a long time since we had a yarn together. Light your pipe and I'll mix a couple of drinks."

The two sat by the fire, talking and smoking. Nearly an hour passed. Blake said not one further word regarding Tinker. But Martin, who knew him so well, could see that his assistant and what had come to light that evening was constantly in his mind, and that he was unusually worried.

The bell of the telephone rang sharply as Martin turned away from his feet to leave.

"It's the Assistant Commissioner," said Blake, after answering the call. "As you had been to the Marylebone Road, he guessed you might have looked in here. He says it's urgent."

Inspector Martin took the proffered receiver and stooped over the instrument.

Blake heard him catch in his breath. "Yes, sir. I'll go along right away," he said, prior to hanging up.

Martin turned slowly from the telephone. For a long moment he looked at Blake without speaking, and there was a very queer, grave look on his red face.

"More trouble?" asked Blake, with an inquiring frown.

"Yes, Blake. Trouble for somebody," Inspector Martin answered, but without any trace of a smile in return. "The Yard's just had news that Dr. Arnold Floyd has been found in his house at Kensington shot through the heart."

TWO police cars dived away from the imposing house lying beyond a short drive and in the shadow of tall trees in a quiet residential road in Kensington.

They held the photographers and finger-print experts of the Yard. They had just completed their routine work in the library at the rear of the house.

In this sumptuously furnished room, with two of the walls lined almost from floor to ceiling with books, stood Sexton Blake, Inspector Martin, and Dr. Martin's chief lieutenant,

Detective-Sergeant Colledge.

Colledge had been first on the spot, and had stood by while the usual flashlight pictures of the dead man, sprawled in a grotesque heap on the floor, had been taken; and while the finger-print men had made their search, but with so result likely to bring any valuable clue in the investigation.

Blake's car was parked in a patch of shadow in the front garden at the side of the drive. For he had requested Martin to allow him to accompany him, and the pair had just arrived.

Blake moved forward, and looked thoughtfully down at the corpse.

Dr. Arnold Floyd lay with his feet towards the front windows, which gave into the garden at the back of the house, and his right shoulder crumpled against the green-painted door of a tall and massive safe standing in the recess. His head lolled against the steel, and altogether he was not a pretty sight.

Blood stained his shirt-front in the region of his heart. On his face and in his glassy, staring eyes was an expression of mingled anger and a frozen surprise which the hand of death had not smoothed away. Lying between his head and the wall, his right arm was crooked upwards so that his waxen-looking hand was suspended in midair. Under it, and resting on his trouser-leg, lay an automatic pistol.

"Anything been disturbed, Colledge?" asked Blake.

In the finger-print man tested that gun, Mr. Blake, the sergeant responded. There are impressions on it, but they are the dead man's own. I, too, have handled it, but I returned it to his thigh as it was found. It is fully loaded, and it is probable that it might never have been fired since its purchase.

"Who found him?" jerked Martin.

"A maidservant. She's rather a dull girl, and I haven't been able to get much out of her. The last I saw of her she was in hysterics, and in care of the cook in the kitchen."

"That French window? I see it is unfastened. Was it so when the doctor was found dead?"

"Yes, Colledge."

Colledge gave a nod. "It was wide open when a constable was called in off his beat by the butler, a man named Joseph Buckley. It's my opinion that somebody shot him from the garden or just inside the room."

"What about outside?"

"It's gravel there, well rolled and hard. There are no footprints visible. The doctor, according to the servants, came home about nine o'clock, slightly the worse for drink, and in a soured temper about something." Colledge went on.

"You see that his lip is swollen and damaged, and it looks as if somebody might have got perved with him and hit him, which would account for his ugly mood. He ordered the cook to send him some coffee. You'll note the pot, the cup and saucer, and the tray dropped over there by the door."

"The maid dropped those in the shock of seeing her master lying where he is by the safe, with his shirt-front red from blood?" suggested Blake.

"Yes. She promptly started her hysterics. The cook and butler rushed here to see what was wrong. It did not take the butler more than a minute to see what his master was quite dead, and he fetched in the constable. The police surgeon has been here, by the way. The bullet that killed Dr. Floyd is still embedded in his body."

"Did nobody hear the shot, supposing that the weapon that killed him was not fitted with a silencer?"

"The butler and cook both believe they heard it. At the time, though, a motor-cycle was in the road, and it was possible that the noise of these houses. It had been making a good deal of row, and the two servants took what they heard to be the machine backfiring."

Colledge suggested. "There is all there is to report. Except that there was nothing in his pocket save for a handkerchief, a wallet holding some twenty

A Present
from
"S. B."



Tinker drew a deep breath and opened the door. Inspector Martin thrust his way past the figure that was a passable imitation of Blake's housekeeper.

pounds, some loose change, and the cigarette-case you see on the table. It isn't a crime bristling with clues to the murderer," he added ruefully.

"No," admitted Blake. "Yes I think we can make a few deductions from what we see here, College."

"We can deduce that he was shot through the heart and murdered," said Martin irritably.

"But who the deuce did it, and why? That's what it's our business to find out."

"You don't follow me, my friend," returned Blake.

"Look at the automatic lying on his leg, which we can presume he was handling with some idea of protecting himself—or his property—when the murderer shot first and killed him."

"Humph! What about it? It's just an automatic pistol—a big and deadly one."

"A big one, as you put it. Exactly," said Blake. "Not the kind of gun a man would be accustomed to carry about in his pocket, particularly in evening dress, as he is."

"Well?"

"Where did it come from? I mean before he seized it and obviously was not given the time to use it."

"Seeing Martin frowning in puzzlement, Blake went on crisply.

"There are no drawers in the table," he said. "There are plenty in the roll-top desk, over

there. But that is on the far side of the room, and if we accept College's assurance that nothing is different from when the crime was first discovered, not one of the drawers was found open."

"If a man grabs a gun from a drawer in an emergency such as I think occurred here, it is natural for him to leave the drawer open. Don't you think that large automatic was probably kept in his safe?"

"By Jove! And the safe is shut!" cried College.

"You mean," snapped Martin, "that Dr. Floyd was at the safe and had opened it just prior to his death. But—"

"But that in his collapse, after being shot, he fell against the door and closed it, though he knew nothing of that," finished Blake. "Yes, that is what I mean. I fancy he was at the safe, as you say, and matched the gun from a shelf within. He was shot, collapsed against the door, and very probably foisted the motives of whoever murdered him."

Inspector Martin glared at the safe, as if trying to wrest from it the secret of what had happened by the intensity of his gaze.

It was fitted with a combination lock, and was the type that would lock itself automatically if the door were slammed.

"There is the possibility," said Blake, "that somebody armed with a gun compelled him to open the safe, seeking something it held. Floyd

may have tried to outwit that person by using the gun he kept in it, but was not quick enough."

Inspector Martin reached over the dead man and gave the handle of the safe door a vigorous twisting tug. But it was as fast-closed as it looked.

"Get the butler in here, College!" he ordered. Joseph Buckley returned to the room with the sergeant almost at once.

He was middle-aged, and, on the face of things, just the usual well-trained servant of his type. That he was a little pallid and nervous was but natural under the circumstances.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes," Martin answered gruffly. "This safe of your master's. Do you by any chance know how to open it?"

"Why, no, sir. As far as I know, only the doctor knew the letters to swing the pointer to in turn to work the combination lock—and he was very particular about opening the safe when not in this room alone. He has sent even me from the library before he would touch it when he wanted anything from the safe."

"I see. What is in it? Any large sum of money, or anything else of particular value?"

"I really don't know, sir. I have never seen inside it. Whether Miss Morrow was told the combination or not—"

"What?"

MARTIN almost jumped, while Sexton Blake looked keenly interested.

"Miss Morrow—Miss Estelle Morrow? What had she to do with your master?" Martin demanded.

"She was here as Dr. Floyd's secretary for a while," the butler replied. "A very nice young lady, I thought her, and she used to help the master with his research work in the laboratory and see to some of his correspondence. She left very hurriedly."

"Why?"

"That I can't say, sir."

Martin rubbed vigorously at his jutting chin, as he had a way of doing when intrigued with a startling development in a case.

"When did she quit Dr. Floyd's employ?" he queried suddenly.

"About six or seven weeks ago," the butler informed him. "She was here in all for about two months. It surprised cook and me when she so suddenly packed her things and went. The doctor never explained—but then he wouldn't."

"He was secretive of nature, eh?"

"Very, sir."

"All right, Buckley. You may go," said Martin. And when the servant had departed:

"So Estelle Morrow worked here as the dead man's secretary, Blake!" he exclaimed. "And she left between six and seven weeks ago. It would be at about that time that she started running round with Julian Haynes and his wife."

Sexton Blake gave a nod.

He began to move around the room, his keen eyes on the alert for any faint clue which might have been missed. He even went outside the windows and flashed the light of an electric torch on the path there.

But, just as College had said, the gravel was too hard to be responsive to feet passing over it.

Sexton Blake returned into the room. He twisted his shoulders, and the laconic word

"Nothing" was seen on his lips when he saw something gleaming under the mounted head of a tiger-skin rug lying between the windows and the murdered man.

Martin watched sharply as Blake stooped.

The rug was slightly displaced. The head was a trifle raised from the floor, and Sexton Blake raised it higher to ascertain the nature of the metallic object under it.

In that instant the ominous detestable felt the blood draining from his cheeks. For the first time in his career he understood what was meant when a person was said to turn sick with horror.

Blake's hand closed over the cigarette-case that lay under the rug. He attempted to slip

it up his sleeve. But Martin was not to be hoodwinked.

"What's that?" he rapped, striding forward.

"What's what?" Blake asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"That!" cried Martin. "What's got you, Blake? Stop fooling, will you?"

The bumpy inspector made a sudden lightning clutch. His hand closed over Blake's fist. With a resigned shrug, Sexton Blake allowed it to go, and as he stared at the slender gold cigarette-case in his grasp, Martin gave a shout of understanding.

"This is Tinker's!" he cried. "It's the case you gave him!"

Only the ticking of the marble clock on the mantelpiece could be heard in the room of death, as for seconds that seemed to the startled College like an eternity the two old friends looked into each other's eyes. Then:

"Yes," Blake admitted, so low that the word was scarcely audible.

Much of Inspector Martin's ruddy colour had gone. He stared down at the gold case, then mechanically opened it and stared again at the inscription within:

"To Tinker from S. B."

"So Tinker came here when he slumped out of Baker Street after your quarrel," Martin muttered, his voice strangely husky. "I wondered when I first had the call from the Yard, but put the idea from me as absurd. Now—"

He stopped and helplessly shook his head, still gazing down dully at the case.

Sexton Blake braced his shoulders.

"But look here, Martin!" he said impatiently. "You aren't thinking Tinker did that?"

He pointed down at the dead man lying crumpled against the door of the safe.

Martin also seemed to take a grip on himself. In a flash he was again the stern and purposeful official of Scotland Yard. His jaw set grimly, and his eyes hardened as they went back to Sexton Blake's.

"What else, am I to think?" he demanded innocently.



SEXTON BLAKE gave a sceptical gesture, and even smiled tolerantly. But it was pure acting. He was the prey of terrible and haunting doubts.

That Tinker was somehow entangled with Estelle Morrow there was no questioning, and where she was concerned he had twice shown a hot-headedness quite foreign to his usual well-balanced manner.

Blake could not forget how, firstly, the young detective had sent Dr. Arnold Floyd staggering from the impetuous blow in the crowded restaurant;

or how, after that, he had been sufficiently carried away to quarrel and accuse him—Blake—of lying.

Somebody had fatally shot the doctor. Tinker's cigarette-case had been found on the scene of the crime. That made it strongly appear certain that the young fellow had at least been here quite recently.

Of course, Blake did not suspect Tinker of murder. That was too absurd. But after a heated quarrel with Floyd, he might have shot him in self-protection when the doctor perhaps snatched the automatic from the safe and turned it his way. Again, if Floyd had menaced Tinker with his gun, the lad might have whipped out his own and the weapon gone off accidentally.

At the same time, self-protection or accident could be distinctly hard to prove to a judge and jury.

Blake's heart grew cold as he swiftly thought of these things.

"You can smile, Blake!" growled Martin. "But I ask you again—what else am I to think?"

"My dear Martin," Blake protested. "You don't even know that Tinker carried a gun to-night. Presently, I think it highly improbable, as he had just returned in dinner clothes from what he had intended to be an evening's amusement."

"There was a bit of a delay before we heard him slam the door after I'd surprised you quarrelling, and he flung out of the consulting-room," Martin said. "He could have slipped into his bed-room and got his automatic before he left the house."

"He could—but did he?" asked Blake. "Hang it all, he isn't the type of young fellow to go out with murder in his mind. There is a possibility that has just occurred to me."

"And that is?"

"That his cigarette-case was planted here. Estelle Morrow was among us during my absence and his wife. I sent Haynes to Dartmoor for a five years' stretch of penal servitude. He probably has never forgiven me for that, and might have tried to strike at me through Tinker."

"You're suggesting he murdered Floyd, and left Tinker's cigarette-case behind to throw suspicion on him? It is possible, Blake, but we don't know that Haynes had any motive for killing this doctor, or that he even knew him. And men don't put their heads in danger of the hangman's noose just to be revenged on somebody else."

No, Tinker stubbornly shook his head.

"No, that don't wash!" he declared. "In any event, I've got to find and question Tinker. If he can't satisfy me that he has not been near this house this evening, I'll have to detain him on suspicion."

"You'd do that?" asked Blake, and his voice was harsh.

"I'd do it to my own son if I believed him guilty of murder!" retorted Martin, his jaw going a little more forward. "I am a police officer, and in all the years I have been you know that I have never shifted my duty. I am the Scotland Yard detective first—the man with human feelings afterwards."

He glared challengingly at Blake for a moment, but then avoided his old friend's steady glance.

"Curse it! I'd hate to do it, Blake. But if Tinker can't satisfy me of his innocence, I'd have no option. Should we go in search of him?"

"As you like," Sexton Blake answered tonelessly.

Watched by College, who seemed stunned from the shock of what had happened, the two men left the library and made their way into the hall.

As they went, Sexton Blake's brain was working at lightning speed.

He heard them—would not—credit that Tinker had shot Floyd, unless the thing was a pure accident, as he had already reasoned. The young fellow should not be arrested. He—Blake—must have time to probe into the mystic circumstances surrounding the murder and establish the real truth.

In some way he was going to warn Tinker to get away and in low for the time being. But how to do it?

They were approaching the front door, where a constable stood on guard. About of him was a small ante-room. On the table, Blake could see a telephone.

Swift as thought, he side-stepped into the room and slammed the door.

He heard Martin utter an explosive oath. A split second before the handle of the door was seized and twisted, Sexton Blake snapped round the key he saw on the door's inner side.

"What's the game?" Martin hammered on the panels with his great fists. "I'll stand for no tricks, Blake! Open this door!" he shouted. "In the name of the law!" he added.

"Aren't you being a little dramatic, my friend?" asked Blake, from the room, where he was snatching the receiver from the telephone, raising his voice so that Martin should hear.

Martin's always red face took on a purplish tinge. He drew back and sent his powerful shoulder crashing against the door.

His eyes on it, Blake swiftly dialled the number of his room. There was a delay fraught with poignant suspense for Blake, while Martin again and again hurled his weight against the door, and it shook and quaked under the onslaught. Then Blake heard Mrs. Bardell's voice.

"Put me on to Tinker—quickly!" Blake rapped, knowing she would recognise his tones.

"He ain't in, Mr. Blake!" the housekeeper informed him, to his dismay. "Is there any message?"

Sexton Blake rapped a "No," and returned the receiver to its rest.

Outside, College had joined Martin.

"Help me with this confounded door!" the detective inspector panted. "Blake's trying to warn him."

Together, the two Yard men drew back. Together they sent their shoulders lugging at the door. With a rousing crack, the lock gave out. The door flew inwards, and both Martin and College pitched to their hands and knees in the room.

"The window!" College cried. "He's gone!"

It was right. A window opposite was raised and gaping, and Sexton Blake had vanished.

THE STABLES CRIME



Ask for

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STARRING SEXTON BLAKE.

This time, Inspector Martin used some very unusual language. Turning, he charged at the phone and his hand closed over the receiver.

Then, however, he paused. A stickler though he was for duty, and in spite of his anger against Blake, he could not quite bring himself to telephone the Yard to effect Tinker's arrest without first giving him a chance to clear himself.

"Stay behind! See to having the body taken to the mortuary and seal the room!" he snapped at Colledge.

Then he rushed to the window and clambered out. He found himself by the side-wall of the house. While he stumbled for a moment on a flower-bed, he heard Sexton Blake's car being started up.

Inspector Martin recovered his balance and dashed that way. He was just in time to see Sexton Blake's car glide smoothly from where it had been parked beside the drive and go towards the gates.

"Stop!" Martin roared.

But Blake was conveniently deaf.

SEXTON BLAKE pulled up his car with a skidding of tyres outside his house in Baker Street, and sprang out. Snatching his latchkey from his pocket, he darted up the steps and entered, to stand for a moment in the hall, listening.

Someone moved in the consulting-room. Blake hurried upstairs and went in. Tinker turned from where he had been holding aside the blind to stare out of the window. He looked pale and troubled, though that could be accounted for by their recent hot words.

"The found your cigarette-case," Tinker, Sexton Blake said. "Do you or do you not know that Dr. Arnold Floyd was found murdered—shot through the heart—roughly an hour ago?"

"Dr. Floyd? Murdered?" Tinker gasped. Sexton Blake eyed him sternly, searchingly. Was his surprise genuine, or was he playing for time while he did some swift thinking?

"He was found shot," continued Blake. "Your cigarette-case was in the room—under the head of a tiger-skin rug. How did it come there, Tinker?"

The detective was a trifle puzzled. If Tinker had been pale before, he was now ashen. At first, he seemed as if he was going to make some outburst. There was horror in his eyes. Then he set his lips and just stared in a queer, strained way at Blake without speaking. Blake strode forward. For the second time that night he dropped his hands to his assistant's shoulders.

"Tinker, you've got to tell me what you know about this," he said. "Martin is on his way here, and unless you've a foolproof alibi, he is fully determined to detain you on suspicion, at least."

Still Tinker was silent. Blake shook him in his impatience.

"Out with it!" he insisted. "You've got to come clean with me, whatever you say to the police later on if they catch you."

"I—" Tinker seemed to be casting about desperately for words. "I would sooner not say anything," he muttered.

"You insufficient young fool! What does this attitude mean?" Blake cried.

He thrust Tinker to armslength, and looked him full in the eye.

"Good heavens! Did you shoot him by some mischance or in a fit of temper against him because of that girl?" he asked, with a buskin in his voice Tinker had never heard before.

"Answer me!"

"I've no answer to give, guy nor!" Tinker told him, after a further pause.

"I will give you another chance," said Blake, his expression stern. "This business is too serious to fool with. Either you tell me everything, Tinker, or I wash my hands of you and—"

There was a thunderous rat-tat-tat at the street door.

"Martin!" said Blake, pushing Tinker from him. "And he's probably posted College or some constable he's picked up on his way here at the back of the house. Quick! Mrs. Bardell's coat and bonnet will be in the hall, as usual. I expect. And to-day she washed a skirt. I chanced to see it hanging over the guard in the kitchen—"

Rat-tat-tat! The knocker was plied again in imperious summons.

"Unless you can face this out, those clothes of hers are your one chance," said Blake.

Tinker looked at him. Blake thought that there was pain in his assistant's face at his threat to have done with him. Tinker hesitated for a moment, then darted from the room.

Sexton Blake pulled his pipe from his pocket and began to push tobacco into it with fingers that were not quite steady. Meantime, he listened intently and heard Tinker go to the kitchen.

The skirt Blake had mentioned was still there. Tinker whipped it from the guard, stepped into it, and fastened it about him. He rolled up his trousers-legs, then tiptoed to the hall. The coat and skirt belonging to the housekeeper were hanging in their accustomed place in the hall cupboard.

The hall was gloomy. The light had been put out, and only the slight illumination from the partially open door of the consulting-room found its way there.

Tinker struggled into the coat. He put on the bonnet and tied the strings under his chin. At such an hour, he would have felt the action farcical. Just now the need of some sort of a disguise to get him past the determined inspector was too desperate to let him feel any humour at what he was doing.

He was so deadly pale that it was plain he was still the victim of nerve-racking strain. The little veins at his temples throbbled in his suspense as he reached out for the door knob.

"Tinker set his teeth. He drew a long breath, then opened the door.

MARTIN just glimpsed the silhouette of the figure that was a passable imitation of Blake's somewhat old-fashioned housekeeper in the gloom. He actually pushed it on one side as he thrust his way into the hall and made for the consulting-room. He heard and was ignorant of the fact that the pseudo Mrs. Bardell had passed out on to the step.

In the consulting-room, Blake looked over the pipe he was lighting, and he had regained all his balance and his business.

"Where is he?" panted Martin.

Sexton Blake twitched his shoulders and shook his head.

"You mean he hasn't been back since you tried to reach him over the phone?" Martin demanded, looking about him suspiciously.

"He is not here, as you can see for yourself," said Blake. "He—"

"Is anything wrong, Mr. Blake?"

The two men jerked round their heads. Mrs. Bardell stood in the doorway, clutching to her a dressing-gown she had slipped on over her night dress.

"I heard all that there knocking," she began, "and wondered—"

Martin's jaw dropped. He was convinced that the person who had admitted him had been dressed for the street, as the housekeeper was certainly not now. She was enveloped in a voluminous dressing-gown.

Sexton Blake shook his head. Mrs. Bardell looked curiously from her master to the

inspector, then withdrew, closing the door softly after her.

Martin stood for an instant staring at it, the vision of the poor woman in her dressing-gown still in her mind's eye.

The truth suddenly dawned on him. He uttered a bull-like roar, and the veins on his neck and forehead were cording darkly as he swung upon Blake.

"By James—foiled!" he cried angrily. "It was Tinker who let me in, and he went out of the front door. I've a mind to arrest you for conniving at his escape."

"I am in your hands," Blake answered carelessly.

"I warn you that you're playing a dangerous game!" snapped Martin. "Even you, Blake, can't defy the law, and I could take you up as an accessory."

"If you really think what you've said just now," said Blake, struggling, "why don't you go after him?"

"Go after him!" Martin repeated, in disgust. "You know as well as I do that, with those ridiculous woman's clothes shed, he might be anywhere by this time. But—"

He brought down his clenched fist smashing into his palm.

"I'll have him now if it's only for my own satisfaction and I have to turn him loose five minutes after I've clapped the handcuffs on him. I'll be hanged if you shall make a monkey of me and get away with it!"

Grimly, still breathing thickly in his wrath, he seated himself at the table and pulled the telephone towards him.

Blake's expression went grave as he listened to the official speaking to Scotland Yard and putting in an "all stations" call for Tinker.

But he remained motionless. It was useless to interfere.

Martin finally told the Yard to cover the hotel where Estelle was, apparently, staying.

"That's that!" he snapped, hanging the receiver back into place.

"Yes, that's that!" agreed Blake; and the said little shake of the head he gave made Martin suddenly lose his aggressiveness and avoid his eyes.

The die was cast with a vengeance!

In a matter of minutes the Flying Squad would be out seeking the young fellow Blake had brought up and loved as a son.

In under the hour, the news that Tinker—Tinker, of all persons—was wanted for Tinker—would be flashed from end to end of the United Kingdom. Every uniformed police officer and every plain-clothes detective would be on the lookout for him.

Worse! By the morning the Press would have the news. The papers would carry an account of the crime and his photograph. Every citizen's hand would be turned against him, and he would be hunted like an escaped wild beast.

What hope had Tinker of long remaining free?

Sexton Blake wondered how it was all going to end. What had really happened between him and ten o'clock in that sinister library?

Tinker had seemed unable or unwilling to explain away the dancing suspicion against him to him, his chief and his best friend. When he was caught, what was he going to say to the police?

The thought that, more than any other, was filling Blake with chagrin was that Tinker had refused to confide in him, as Blake had sought. If there was something that Tinker could not tell him—there seemed some justification in Martin's suspicion.



THERE was a repetition of the strained silence that had fallen between the official and unofficial detective when Tinker's cigarette-case had first come to light near the murdered Dr. Floyd.

Sexton Blake remained where he was, standing by the mantelpiece, an arm resting on it, and his pipe, which he had allowed to go out, held unnoticed in his hand. His shoulders seemed to have drooped, and he looked almost haggard.

Martin had settled his felt hat more firmly on his bullet head and moved towards the door.

There he hesitated and looked uncomfortably back at Blake. He shifted from one foot to the other uneasily. Twice he made as if to stride from the consulting-room, and turned back again to eye his friend of many years.

Abruptly, he walked over to Sexton Blake and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"By heck! I'm sorry, Blake," he said.

Blake nodded understandingly.

"You've done only your duty, Martin," he answered dully. "I don't really hold any ill-feeling against you. Come along!"

Blake dropped the pipe to the mantelpiece and squared his shoulders, with his keen face losing its look of haggard weariness and growing alert.

"Come along—where?" Martin asked.

"Where else but to Dr. Arnold Floyd's house?" Sexton Blake returned. "Tinker didn't kill him, Martin, or, if he did, it was the most ghastly accident that ever happened. I've got to solve this case if I never solve another."

"I can't see that it's possible we missed any clues. But I'm hoping—praying—that we might have found, and I've got to comb that library inch by inch on the slender chance of coming upon something that will give me a line to the truth."

"Wait a minute, then. I must tell a constable I put at the back that there is no longer any need for him to hang about," Martin said, rather shamefacedly, confirming the idea Blake had had that the rear of the house was guarded.

When Martin rejoined Blake, they went out to the latter's car and drove back to the house of tragedy in the quiet residential road of Kensington.

It was Sexton Blake who plied the knocker, and he naturally expected that constable who had been in the hall when he had left would open the door at once. But nothing happened, and there was still no response when Blake knocked a second time.

"What the deuce does this mean?" growled Martin. "The back probably been taken for the mortuary, but College must have cleared up and sealed the room mighty quickly if he's gone. Let me have a shot!"

In a humorous vein, Sexton Blake had once said that there was no man in London who could misuse a knocker like the worthy Martin. He proved that now. The house responded to his vigorous, pugnaconic double rat-lat.

"Can't understand it," he grumbled. "College would surely have left the constable here, even if he had you the Yard's official was on the windows and door of the library. What—"

The front door opened as he angrily reached again for the knocker. It was Buckley, the butler, who peered out at them. He wore a dressing-gown over trousers and slippers.

"Hallo, my man! Where's the constable?" Martin barked.

"The policeman, sir? He was in the hall when I and the cook and maid went up to our rooms. I understood he was going to stay all night."

Martin impatiently pushed him out of the way. Followed by Buckley he strode through the house to the door of the library. It was closed, but a glance showed the two men that the door had not been officially sealed.



Martin flung it open. He started to stride in, but stopped so suddenly with a shout of amazement that Blake blundered into his back.

"Good grief, look!" he jerked.

He might well tell Blake to look.

At their feet the uniformed constable was squirming in bonds that lashed his hands behind his back and his ankles together. He was minus his helmet, and there was a contused wound on his temple. A cruel gag formed of an alony ruler forced between his teeth and tied round the back of his head allowed him only to gurgle chokingly.

The murdered man had been removed.

Where he had lain, sprawled Detective-Sergeant College. He also was bound and gagged, but apparently was unconscious.

The door of the safe stood wide. A jagged hole had been burned in the steel door in the region of the combination lock.

Sexton Blake was the first to recover from the surprise of the chaotic sight. He thrust his way past Martin, and, stopping over the constable, hurried to the safe.

It was absolutely empty. Whatever had been in it had been cleared out in bulk.

MARTIN dropped on his knees beside the policeman, removed the gag, and started to cut through the cords that bound him. Blake rendered a similar service to Detective-Sergeant College, whose head was also damaged.

"Well, my man? You've let a pretty game be played here!" Martin almost snarled. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"It wasn't my fault, sir," pleaded the policeman, as he rose stiffly. "I heard a noise here, wondered what it was, and came along to investigate. I saw Mr. College lying where you see him now, and a man and a woman were stooping over him."

"The man held a life-preserver. I started to rush forward, and someone else who I didn't even see let me have it over the side of the head from behind. I didn't know any more, and I've only just come to my senses."

"Humph! This man and woman! What were they like?"

"I didn't see their faces. They were both masked."

"Was the woman young, do you think?" put in Blake, and Estelle Merrow was in his mind.

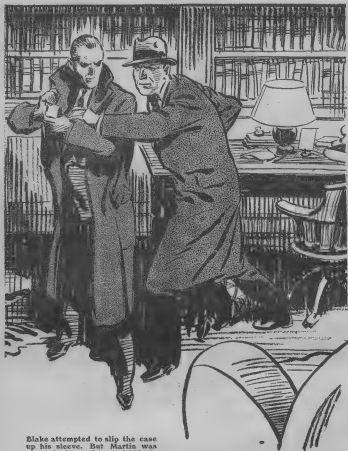
"She was pretty slender, sir."

"And her hair?"

"I only caught the merest glimpse of her before the third person, who was standing behind the door, hit me, Mr. Blake. But I got an impression that it was darkish."

Blake gave a nod. The description could fit either Estelle or Miriam Haynes. He felt that the Haynes were mixed up in the grim happenings here, and, if they were, Estelle Merrow was possibly involved, too. Which of the two had the masked woman been if his instinct was correct?

The constable was adding that the man he



Blake attempted to slip the case up his sleeve. But Martin was not to be hoodwinked. "What's that?" he snapped, and made a lightning clutch.

had now had been tall and fairly slim of build. It fitted in with Blake's idea. All very vague, of course, but it could have been Julian Haynes.

Sexton Blake slipped a cushion under College's head. He was showing signs of regaining his senses. The detective saw that the visitors were unfazed. He pulled one of the casements open and stepped into the garden. But all was silent there, and the three visitors had doubtless been gone for some time.

Blake returned to the room, pushing the window to after him. He looked ruefully at the safe.

"I came with the means to open this," he said to Martin, and tapped a pocket of his overcoat. "I've a crackman's microphone with me. But somebody else has anticipated me with an oxy-acetylene blow-lamp."

"What were they after, and what have they taken away with them? That's what I'd like to know."

"The document or some other object for which Dr. Floyd was murdered," said Blake. "Do you still think that Tinker fired the fatal shot?"

"This doesn't let him out, by any means," Martin declared. "Floyd knew the girl,

Estelle Morrow, whom you yourself admit Tinker's fallen for badly. Floyd might have had something she was desperate to get hold of, and Tinker have tried to get it for her in the first place. He was here to-night, anyway, and we know he was bitter enough against the doctor to knock him down and create a scene in a public restaurant, Blake."

Sexton Blake realized the reasoning was feasible, and made no reply. He was back with College and bathing his temples with water from a canafe.

College groaned, and his eyes opened.

He uttered a cry of dismay when Blake helped him to a chair, and he saw the condition of the safe.

"You mustn't blame the constable," he said, when he knew just what had occurred. "If anybody has bungled, it's I. I went out to take a last look round the garden, just in case any clue had been left farther from the windows that our previous investigations had covered—and I was incautious enough to leave them temporarily unfurnished when I returned."

"They stole in and took you by surprise?" asked Blake, and Martin regarded his usually highly efficient subordinate sourly.

"One of them did, Mr. Blake. I was making a note or two at the table, and felt a draught. I rose and turned, and there was a masked man right on me. I hadn't time to hit out at him, or even to shout before I was clobbered and put clean out."

Inspector Martin suppressed a snort of impatience and pulled out his pipe. To reach his tobacco-pouch, he drew from his pocket a handkerchief in which something was wrapped. The handkerchief fell slightly apart, and, with a re-awakening of his suspense and uneasiness, Sexton Blake saw that it was Tinker's cigarette-case.

On the corner that was exposed was a finger-print standing out whitely.

Blake gave a gesture of impatience.

"Not much good bringing up finger-prints on that," he said. "Tinker might have handed it to a dozen friends for them to help themselves to a cigarette since he last polished it."

"I didn't do this," replied Martin, nodding down at the impression.

"What do you mean?"

"That the finger-print was standing out like this when you found the case and I snatched it from you. The gold has happened to come into contact with some sort of whitish powder, and the finger-print has been brought out like this accidentally."

"Let me look!" urged Blake.

After an almost imperceptible hesitation, Inspector Martin passed him the cigarette-case. Blake took it carefully by its edges, and for some moments studied the prominent imprint.

For some reason a gleam of eagerness had stolen into his eyes. He was about to say something as he passed the case back to Martin when he stopped and held up his hand sharply.

"There's somebody in the garden!" he breathed. "Quiet—and get out of sight of the windows."

Hastily, they all moved out of range of the casements. Blake had made no mistake. They could hear the slow, stealthy footfalls of someone who was cautiously approaching. They stood rigid, straining their ears, their eyes fixed speculatively on the windows.

The clock on the mantelpiece began to strike twelve, breaking the tense hush in the room. One of the casements was pushed inward, and then—

"Are you there, doctor?" a soft voice asked.

"Yes. Come in!" said Blake, in a similar subdued tone.

The window was pushed wider. Next instant a slender woman, heavily veiled, stepped into the room. She uttered a startled cry as she glimpsed the constable, and wheeled round to make a panic-stricken retreat.

TINKER hardly dared to breathe when Inspector Martin padded him unceremoniously aside at the street door. He slipped out of the house and closed the door behind him.

In the parlored coat, bonnet, and hand-bag, Tinker walked awkwardly away, close to the wall. His suspense was still tantalizing his nerves to the limit. Every second he expected to hear the front door of Sexton Blake's house wrenched open again and to find Martin in angry pursuit.

Several pedestrians came towards Tinker. He stooped to hide his face, and, clutching the coat to him as if against the rather biting wind, he shuffled past them.

He wanted to reach a quiet passageway, some thirty yards ahead, where he could, with luck, get rid of the woman's clothing unnoticed.

On he went. He had a thrill when he saw the constable on the beat padding towards him in his rubber-soled boots. Baker Street was growing quiet, and the policeman was flashing his light on the doors and windows as he came along.

(Continued on page 14.)

Estelle Explains

POISON-PEN

The poison of the anonymous slander writer has broken friendships, parted families, terrorized whole towns . . . and the motives of the writer are so obscure, the mask of secrecy so effective, that the resources of modern detective science are required to expose them.

A whole town jumpy with suspicion . . . every grown-up in it tortured with the stings of guilty conscience and the impending fear of public exposure; everyone racked with a mental anguish that must at all costs be hidden from others, lest worse befall . . . Nervous dread—the fear of people's whisperings and averted glances—the fountain of good will poisoned at its source. And lurking in the shadows is some evil-minded, sinister Unknown ever and again fouling the stream with a pen.

A TRIFLE high-drawn that, as a picture of the anonymous letter menace? Some-what exaggerated? Too big a dash of the melodramatic?

Well, well, we shall see. Let us stick to facts.

To begin with, we will discover just what "poison-pen" letter-writing is. It is not, of course, the sending of merely anonymous letters; that is itself is not a new phenomenon. It may displease or loathe the motives of the writer which make him keep to the safety of anonymity. Ordinary unsigned letters—thousands of which probably go through the post daily—do not wreck the peace of mind of entire communities; poison-pen letters, which can, and do, are in a different class, and happily are much rarer.

They break out like an epidemic in one locality, are all on similarly scandalous lines, and are written by one person. They set out to wreck the moral reputation of local people by spreading a network of lies and innuendoes so bolstered up with facts and half-facts that the lie are all too easy of belief. They are believed, and the victim concerned soon becomes aware that everywhere things are being whispered about him, lies which he can neither disprove nor trace to their source.

It is easy to talk about putting anonymous letters in the wastepaper-basket, but in actual practice they get more attention than the signed sort—provided the writer has been eccentric enough.

The lies spread by the postal poisoner multiply, added by more letters and the inevitable gossip. Suspicion seeps through the community. No case is safe. Until the writer is found, there is no peace for the town harbouring the wielder of a poison-pen.

THERE is no element of blackmail in the writing; no threat of exposure if reward is not forthcoming. Poison-pen writers not only work for no tangible reward,

but often have no definite scheme in view and cannot themselves—they are almost invariably women—say what makes them do it, especially as their letters often contain expressions of such depravity that they could hardly be induced to think of them in the ordinary way, let alone deliberately write them down.

The mysterious motive for their scandalous abuse lies deep in their subconscious selves; it was only revealed in each case by the work of a psycho-analyst.

The poison-pen campaign of Angèle Laval—of which more presently—was caused, it was stated, by the inward disappointment of her keeps when she failed to marry a certain fellow-clerk whom she had expected would propose to her. It is almost certain that some such hidden and unsuspected motive drives all these unhappy people, but the medical viewpoint is apt to be ignored by the matter-of-fact law, which is notoriously years behind medical progress.

The view most likely to be taken is that expressed by a certain learned judge when sentencing a poison-pen writer: "This is a form of persecution often very difficult to detect, and for which there can be no excuse whatever, because there is no temptation to it. It is pure wickedness, and very cruel wickedness."

The judge was certainly right about its being difficult to detect, anyway. The famous Tulle case was involved for nearly three years.

Tulle is the town in the South of France which gave its name to the gangster dress material called tulle, for the stuff was originally manufactured there. But far less reputable was the fame that came to this sleepy, out-of-the-way place when its poison-pen campaign of 1920-22 overbore the boundaries of the town and got headlines in the world's news.

At intervals various residents began to receive anonymous letters. At first the receipt of them gave rise to nothing more than disgust and indignation—tinged, perhaps with a piquant secret sense of satisfaction at having the raw material, ready-made, for some fresh and interesting gossip.

But as time went on fresh letters were received—by other people—and the malicious innuendoes and spiteful lies were spread farther afield, including as victims some of those who had received, and glibly spread the information of, the first letters. When at last these people began to find that they themselves were beginning to be talked about, the piquant pleasures of gossip-by-mail began to lose some of its appeal.

The method of the unknown writer was to write to A, accusing X of marital infidelities, or other misdeeds, and to ask A to pass the letter on to B and C and D and others named, the last of the series being requested to send it to X. The refined cruelty of this system was that it showed the unhappy X that his scandal was being talked about by at least the number of townfolk, named in the letter, who were all known to him or her. And—the maddeningly tragic part of it—the accused knew that the accusation was a lie.

Letters would be addressed to wives, casting suspicion on the lives of their husbands; and to husbands, suggesting that they watch their wives. The poison-pen-aided writer seemed to know everybody's business, for there was always some authoritative fact—often believed to be unknown outside the family concerned—included in the innuendoes. In two or three families secrets were disclosed which were quite unknown to the present generation, and flatly contradicted until inquiries were made which startlingly confirmed the facts.



DR. LOCARD
Who solved the Tulle poison-pen mystery.



THE poison-letters were signed "Tiger's Eye," and as the months went on the name became a byword of dread in Tulle. Old friendships were broken, families parted and scattered, some of them leaving the district; three people became insane; there was one suicide entirely to the mental stress-cause by the letters.

A pall of gloom and suspicion overhung the place like some miasmic fog. People hardly dared be seen speaking to each other in the public street lest they be suspected of spreading new scandal. Literally, no one felt safe.

Naturally, the police were appealed to. They did their best, but it was nothing. The insidious plot went on. Even clairvoyants and a hypnotist were brought in to solve the puzzle of the writer's identity. They, too, failed. The hypnotist, in the Tulle court-room and before the examining judge, practised his skill on a suspected girl. The only result was to plunge her into a fit of hysteria, and she was carried out laughing like a maniac.

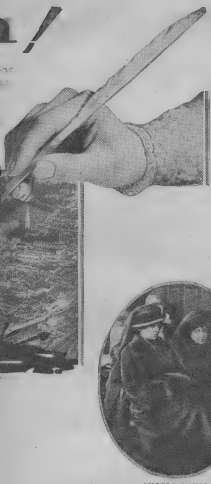
Science—and a lot of hard work—at last tracked down Tiger's Eye.

In the third year of the campaign there were thousands of letters, a few scores of which were obviously the work of imitators, but the majority just as certainly the work of one person. Two hundred of these were collected and sent to Dr. Edmond Locard, chief of the Police Laboratory at Lyons.

Dr. Locard is one of the half-dozen or so world-famous scientific criminologists of the Continent. Amongst other things, his researches into hand-writings have led to his invention of a system of identification and comparison which he has named *graphology*.

It was this system, based on minute resemblances of the angles of the sloping strokes, that enabled him to name Tiger's Eye. To do this he had to compare the disguised writing of the anonymous letters with handwriting specimens of hundreds of suspects obtained by the police in Tulle.

The writing of the letters and the disguised writing of a specimen he picked out were, he proved, identical. And the name of the writer was Angèle Laval.



ANGELE LAVAL
The "Tiger's Eye" of Tulle (left) and her
mother at one of the official investigations.

This was a girl who had been formerly employed as a clerk in one of the departmental offices of the town; incidentally, she was the sister of a captain in the gendarmerie.

In some way it became known to her that she was under suspicion, with the result that both she and her mother made a suicide pact and jumped into the water. Angele's cries brought aid, and she was rescued; but the mother drowned. This was the second suicide directly due to the poison-pen campaign.

Arrested, Angele Laval was placed on trial as the author of the letters which had brought a three-year spell of misery and tragedy to Tulle. At first she denied the evidence of the handwriting experts, knowing their reputation for contradicting each other in court. But that of Dr. Lécuyer was of a different kind; there was no guess-work about his graphometry.

She was found guilty and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, with bonds under the First Offenders' Act, and fined 100 francs for public libel, five francs for private libel, and 200 francs damages to each plaintiff in the particular case brought. A light enough sentence this, but the tribunal stated that there were extenuating circumstances revealed by the medical witnesses, and the plaintiffs were seeking only the clearing of their reputations.

Thus was brought to light the thing that had begun in the mysterious darkness of a girl's mind

when, overcome with jealousy and disappointed hopes of marriage, she had been impelled to seek an outlet for her emotions in spreading scandal and slander, and watching the domestic disasters her writings had wrought.

At the same time as the Tulle case was nearing its climax in France, and the developments were being recorded in the world's newspapers, a poison-pen writer in England was embarking on a campaign which, although not an sensational, was even more mysterious, for the writer was never found. The chief victim, apart from those who were recipients of scurrilous letters, was a Miss Dorothy Myrtle Thurburn, who was accused of writing the libels and put on trial three times at Norwich Assize. In each trial the jury could not agree on a verdict, and it was only after months of suspense and mental anguish that she was honourably acquitted.

The background of this campaign of postal calumny was Sheringham, in Norfolk, a pleasant town paralleling in many ways that of Tulle as a spot favourable for the spread of rumour and gossip. For the French town's population were mainly elderly people living on official pensions, and therefore more than ordinarily interested in little-didde; and it was in the residential, seaside town of Sheringham, with its colony of well-to-do and little-occupied people, that a barrage of poison-pen letters also caused devastating effects. The same place had, indeed, proved a fertile breeding-ground for poison-pen scandals on two previous occasions, for there had been outbreaks there two years and eighteen years before.

Possibly on this latest occasion the Tulle affair influenced the unknown scandal-monger to imitation—a quite common crime-phenomenon; and if so this person was a good disciple. The Sheringham letters started in October, 1923, and in 1925 Miss Thurburn herself was still being persecuted when, three months after the trial that had acquitted her, and over two years since the plague had first started.

Miss Thurburn was tried at the assize in January. The jury could not agree on a verdict, and a new trial was ordered. This took place in June. The second jury also could not agree, and yet a third trial was ordered, due to take place the following October. Meanwhile the poison campaign was still continuing. Letters, increasingly violent in tone and coarser in expression, flowed through the mails to the Sheringham residents who had received the others, and this included Miss Thurburn herself. An unexpected development, however, was that most of them had been posted in distant places like York and Middlesex.

The third time this unfortunate girl stepped into the dock, after endless months of terrific mental strain, she did not have to go through the ordeal of yet another trial. The prosecution offered no evidence; she was acquitted and free.

More than 2,000 letters and postcards had been written to sixty different people, sometimes as many as thirty letters being delivered during one post, some of them ten pages in length. The mere labour of writing them, and in a despatched form, must have been enormous—a fact which suggests there is a strange and compelling fascination in the poison-pen process for those unbalanced beings who are addicted to it.

While it would be charitable to assume that the perpetrators of these poison-pen letters do not realize to the full the terrible effect of their crime, most of them are sufficiently aware of the nature of their authorship to make efforts to divert suspicion from themselves.

Apart from the elementary precaution of disguised handwriting, the commonest form of fake alibi is to include themselves amongst the recipients of such anonymous letters.

And, such are the incredible torments which warped human nature is capable, these letters, written by themselves, seem to move them to outbursts of indignation and horror every bit as intense and genuine as the reactions of real victims.

Aware of this, the expert who is called upon to solve the problem of identity, is careful to include in his samples of handwriting specimens from all the victims of the poison-pen campaign, making his examinations.

The courts to the County of Norfolk for the

prosecution had been £2,000—about £1 per letter—while the unfortunate victim's official cost had £4,000. Even when the sentence was not rendered, two months after the acquittal the first of a series of new letters came to her where she had sought refuge in a seaside town on the South Coast. She fled to London, but again the unknown persecutor discovered her address and more letters followed.

WHERE a poison-pen persecution is in progress in its usual location of a small community, such as a village or a small town, the method often used to try to trap the culprit is by using invisible ink on stamps.

The local post office is practically the only one used by residents, and as everybody is known by name to the postmaster, those thought to be involved are all stamps marked with some code which will identify them as the buyer. Later, the stamps on anonymous letters are examined; and in several cases the unknown scandal-monger has been revealed by this means, one instance being that of a woman living at Coleford, Gloucestershire, who received six months' imprisonment after a short career as a poison-pen writer.

A quick solution is unfortunately the exception and not the rule where anonymous-letter fiends are concerned. And, even when, after a long and arduous series of investigations, the detectives make an arrest, grave hardship may be done, as with the Sheringham case, so difficult is it to trace the real offender.

At Littlehampton, in 1920, a Mrs. Rose Gooding was charged with sending libels through the post concerning her neighbour, Mrs. Edith Swann, and was sentenced to prison for ten days, she already having been in gaol for two and a half months.

Fifteen months later Mrs. Gooding was again arrested on a similar charge and this time her sentence was more severe—twelve months. She appealed against this, but the appeal was dismissed.

Meantime, while she was in prison, further inquiries were going forward. The police had come into possession of fresh information and were not satisfied that justice had been done. The case was put before the Home Secretary, and she was released, her convictions being quashed.

For the injuries and mental anguish Mrs. Gooding had suffered she was paid £250 compensation.

Within four months there was a sequel. Mrs. Swann, the victim of the poison-pen persecution, was herself accused of libelling a third individual, but after a trial at the assize was acquitted.

This was another case in which the mystery of a poison-pen writer was never solved.

What an enormous amount of patient detective work, year in and year out, that such an investigation may mean is not easy for the outsider to imagine.

And, as if to prove that the poison-pen epidemic started by the great Tulle case is still creeping, the police are still at this moment trying to discover the person who is terrorizing the inhabitants of Wellington.

For the past few years this creeping Unknown has been spreading the sinister abuse of his (or her) evil and malicious mind over the inhabitants of the Wellingtonshire area. The campaign started as far back as 1923, in the village of Wellington, four miles outside the town. It has gone on more or less continuously ever since, stopping only while intensive police investigations have been in progress.

While medical science has been going ahead and discovering the obscure reasons which urge these scandal-mongers to defend their victims, criminologists are still and distrust among innocent people, until each case as another of the breed is caught and it can be revealed how certainly modern scientific methods serve the people and prove that nowadays there is no longer safety in anonymity.

Next week the "Isles of the Doomed,"
the story of Devil's Island.

Now they were drawing abreast. Agnir Tinker held his breath. He had a strong reason for wishing to reach Estelle Morrow at the small hotel where she was staying. He braced himself.

It came to him, he was prepared to trip the guardian of the law and make a neck-or-nothing bolt for it.

The constable glanced casually Tinker's way. He little dreamed of the increased suspense he instilled into the young detective by his action.

But his light was directed elsewhere. Apparently, he saw nothing in the "elderly woman" to arouse his suspicions. He plodded on, and Tinker heaved a great sigh of relief.

The young fellow quickened his pace. He reached the mouth of the alley. Midway down it was a street lamp. But the passage was luckily deserted.

Into it Tinker slipped. In a matter of seconds he was out of the skirt, coat, and locket and had tossed them into a patch of shadow. The trouble was now that he was in dinner-clothes, without either hat or overcoat, and conspicuous for that reason.

On through the passage he went. His brain was working fast to find some way to change his appearance for a second time. A disengaged taxi came crawling along, just as several late birds were regarding him curiously, and Tinker threw up his hand.

"Had my hat and overcoat pinched," he said to the driver, with a rueful laugh. "You might take me to the Waterloo." "Sure I will, sir," said the man.

"Sure I will, sir," said the man. "It ain't safe to leave nothing about these days."

"You're right," said Tinker, and sighed once more devoutly as he leaned back in the taxi's dark interior, and the driver slammed the door.

The young detective remained passive until they reached the Strand. The cab turned into one of the side streets leading to the Embankment, and Tinker was suddenly on his feet.

He fortunately had some money on him. From his wallet he took a ten-shilling note and dropped it on to the seat as he rose.

Cautiously, his eyes on the silhouette of the driver's back, he opened the door of the cab. With hardly a sound, as the vehicle slowed to pass a stationary lorry, Tinker dropped to the road.

The cab went on, and nobody saw. Tinker dived into a branch street opposite, and, walking swiftly, presently gained the Embankment. Down here by the river there was a trace of fog. Tinker thanked a kind providence for it.

From where he paused by the coping overlooking the turbid water, he saw a constable moving along and half-heartedly raising the human derelicts on the seats.

"Now, then, you can't see here, you know!" he heard the man say formally, and not unkindly. "Come on out."

The policeman was human, like most of his class. Having stirred the poor, wet wretches, he passed on, and did not look round. He knew full well that they would drift back to the seat they had occupied, or go to another to doze, but he had done his duty.

Tinker allowed him to get out of sight in the mist. Then he slowly followed in the officer's wake, eyeing the unfortunates who were settling down again on the seats.

He saw a man with hollow cheeks and a dejected, hopeless look, whose eyes told the constable had been conversationally obnoxious. The man was of about Tinker's build, and he wore a lengthy overcoat, faded, patched, and ragged. An old scar was about his throat. He was just the homeless wreck for whom Tinker had been searching.

There was a vacant place on one side of him, and the old white-haired woman on the other was already falling off again to sleep. Tinker sidled to the seat and sank down beside the man.

"Would you care for a cup of coffee and something to eat?" he asked softly.

"Wouldn't I, just, sir?" the man answered,

starting and staring in surprise at the well-dressed young fellow beside him.

"I'm nigh on starving," he added, and really looked it.

"Come with me, then," Tinker said.

They rose and left the seat. Tinker made his way across the road and into one of the turnings leading up to the Strand. The man who slouched at his side was peering round at him furtively, for they had passed a coffee-stall, which Tinker had ignored.

"Now, look here!" Tinker said crisply. "I'm not going to buy you coffee or anything to eat—"

"Then why the blazes did you disturb me?" the fellow asked. "If this is your idea of a joke, young fellow—"

"Shut up and listen, will you?" rapped Tinker. "I'm in a jam. I want your cap, scarf, overcoat and boots. For the last, you can have my shoes, and I think they'll about fit you. For the other things, I'll give you a fiver and you can go and eat and drink whatever you like."

A cunning look sprang into the vagrant's eyes.

"Whether been up to?" he asked. "S'posing I shouted for the cops?"

"Then you'd get nothing, and if you are really starving you'd go on doing it," Tinker told him. "It's not worth giving me what I want, taking the fiver and asking no questions?"

"Yus! I'm yer man. I was only jokin'," the fellow said, starting with alacrity to peel off his apology for an overcoat. "You can have the whole 'ole 'Ouse of Commons for all I care!"

In a minute the strange deal was completed. Tinker's dinner-jacket and white shirt front were concealed by the ragged, threadbare overcoat and the scarf. He had discarded his collar and neck black bow, had the ragged cap on his head, and was stooping to lace the patched and dilapidated boots which were just contriving to hang on his feet.

"Thanks!" he said. "Here you are—and good luck!"

"Oh! I don't want this, if I can help it," the man protested, looking at the crisp five-pound note Tinker had thrust into his hand.

"If I tried to change this note, someone interferes!" Tinker declared me on suspicion.

Tinker changed the fiver for five one-pound notes. Leaving the man staring after him in mingled suspicion and curiosity, he made himself scarce as swiftly as he could.

Out of sight of the "down and out," he turned into another side-street. Stooping, he scooped mud from the gutter and plastered it upon his once immaculate black trousers until they looked as old and worthless as his other outer garments.

"**W**ONDER how far Martin's gone and if the whole of Scotland Yard is looking for me by this time," Tinker muttered grimly, as he made for the small, unobtrusive hotel where Estelle Morrow was staying. "If so, they might be on the look-out at Estelle's hotel, and I've got to watch my step."

There was a courtyard at the hotel's rear. Tinker gained it, and, clinging to the shadows, stole to a fire-escape connected with the rear balcony.

He went up it and along the balcony between the windows of the third story. As he passed certain of the casements, he ducked out of sight, for many had lights still burning behind them.

On many one occasion he had seen Estelle come to the hotel, and presently he believed he was outside her sitting-room. The blind was lowered, however, and Tinker prayed for luck as he had never done before, as he risked passing by the glass with his hands. He was not too sure this was the room, and it would be awkward if he brought out some nervous guest to see him in his present down-at-heel attire.

The blind moved. His heart played queer tricks. Then, to his relief, he saw Estelle's girlish face pressed to the pane.

He saw her start. She then stared hard, evidently having glimpsed his ragged overcoat and cap.

"Let me in—quick!" His lips little more than formed the words, but they had the desired effect.

Estelle sent the blind whirling up and opened one of the windows. Tinker entered, closed it after him, and relit the blind.

As his eyes met hers, he saw that she was deathly pale. She smiled at him, but it was a caricature of her usual vivacious smile.

"What's the idea? Are you on a case?" she asked, her glance on his dreadful clothes.

"No."

The young detective uttered the word after a long pause, in which he gazed at her searchingly.

"Estelle," he then burst out, "I loaned you my cigarette-case when I left you this evening because you had found you were out of cigarettes. I said you could give it back to me at any time, and that I could get some cigarettes out of a machine. That case was found at Dr. Frey's house to-night in the room where he lives."

Tinker broke off with a concerned cry. She had started, and he thought she was going to faint. He sprang forward and took her in his arms.

"Estelle, what happened?" he asked hoarsely. "My heavens! Did you fire the shot that killed him?"

She was suddenly sobbing wildly, hysterically, her face hidden against his shoulder. "For the time being, Tinker, who looked ghastly in his pallor, could only hold her close."

"Dig me to be pained as closely, at length."

She calmed herself to some extent, and, to his consternation, she nodded.

He groaned.

"How did it happen?" he asked. "Why did you go to his house at all? And after his laughing you told me just what I told you. I don't believe what he said. I know he only found you examining his safe out of curiosity. You should have ignored his lies, Estelle!"

"Oh, I wish I could tell you everything. Tinker, and that I had not deceived you!" she sobbed. "I told you just what I told you to fear me at his safe, as I told you to-night. If you weren't so much in love with me, dear, you wouldn't have believed me so easily. I—I was trying to open his safe when he surprised me. I had become his secretary just to get a chance to open it—because I hoped there was something in it I desperately wanted."

Before Tinker could speak, she pushed him a little from her. She stared at his ragged clothing.

"Why are you dressed like this?" she demanded, with horror beginning to dawn in her eyes. "It's because of this case! The police suspect you, and are after you! Oh!"

"Don't be stupid!" Tinker protested, forcing a laugh. "As if the police would suspect the assistant of Sexton Blake of anything!"

"You cannot deceive me!" Estelle interrupted. "The police do suspect! They are hunting you! You would not be wearing those old rags otherwise. There is only one thing for me to do."

She rushed to the table and reached for the receiver of the telephone. Uttering a cry, Tinker sprang at her and dragged her, struggling, out of reach of the instrument.

"I must give myself up!" she said, though pallid, quivering lips. "I cannot let you be blamed for the terrible thing I have done."

She rushed to the table and reached for the receiver of the telephone. Uttering a cry, Tinker sprang at her and dragged her, struggling, out of reach of the instrument.

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Tinker held out his wrists as he to receive the handcuffs. Next instant he took a flying spring and landed on the detective's chest.

wanted to frighten him into giving me something out of his safe when I pointed the pistol at him."

She glanced toward the dainty handbag lying on the table. Tinker released her, went to it, and took from it the pistol. He weighed it thoughtfully in his hand for a moment, then dropped it into his pocket.

"Go on, and take it calmly," he said, reaching for her hand.

"Well, I thought I'd got the better of him. He opened the safe. But then he laughed at me and suddenly snatched a pistol from inside the safe and ordered me to drop mine."

"And then?"

"Oh, it's all so confused!" Estelle moaned, sinking into an easy chair and hiding her face in her hands. "I recoiled and stumbled over a tiger-skin rug. My bag must have fallen upon then, I think, but I did not know your case and dropped out. It was as I stumbled that my gun suddenly seemed to roar—it sounded like a roar in that room—and I saw Dr. Floyd falling to one side, with blood showing on his shirt front. Oh, what—what will they do to me?"

"Nothing," Tinker lied. "It was an accident, anyway."

"But I could never prove that," she pointed out, looking up with tears trembling like jewels on her long, dark lashes. "You see—"

"Esk!" Tinker whispered, his eyes going to the door. He thought he heard somebody move stealthily outside. "Is that locked, Estelle?"

"Yes," she breathed back.

As she spoke, somebody rapped tentatively at the panels.

"Answer!" Tinker urged, his lips close to her ear. "Ask who it is and what they want?"

"Who is it? What do you want?" Estelle called obediently.

"We want a few words with you," returned a man's gruff tones. "Unlock this door."

Estelle hesitated, her face like chalk as she looked from the door to Tinker.

"We are police officers," announced the voice outside.

"Oh, what shall we do?" the girl whispered, wringing her hands. "Let me tell them everything and take my chance? They—"

Tinker seized her wrist almost fiercely, compelling her to stay in the chair. He spoke in a low, insistent tone.

"Estelle, give me a promise to let them go on thinking it's me they want for that ghastly business. Just for the time being, so that I can try to figure some way of getting you out of this mess as well as myself."

"I—I can't do that. I must speak—for your sake," she objected.

Again the panel was pounded, this time more vigorously.

"You must do it! You must do it!" Tinker persisted. "Keep silent for three days, then. Promise!"

She looked at him with agonized doubt in her eyes.

Then she nodded.

"Because of something I have set out to do—for the sake of another—I promise!" she breathed.

"Let 'em in when I've got away!" Tinker instructed, turning to the window. "Good-bye, Estelle!"

He heard the girl close the casement after him as he crept out on to the balcony. Down the fire-escape he went, with every nerve alert, quivering with excitement.

He could see nobody in the courtyard. Was it possible that the police, who obviously were covering Estelle's hotel in their search for him, had been so lax as to leave the rear of the premises unguarded?

It almost seemed so. Lower and lower Tinker stole. Then, when he only some six steps from the ground, two burly men in plain clothes detached themselves from the shadows.

The beam of an electric torch shot upwards and rested fully upon Tinker's face.

"Here he is!" cried the owner of the torch, whom Tinker had recognized as a detective sergeant named Ellery, a self-opinionated officer, who made a point of sneering at private detectives, and who disliked him and Blake especially.

"Looks as if you've nabbed me, Ellery," shrugged Tinker.

"Looks mighty like it!" agreed the detective, with a self-satisfied smile. "I expected the resourceful assistant of Mr. Sexton Blake to give us a damned sight longer hunt than this!"

Tinker descended a step and held out his wrists as if to receive the handcuffs. Next instant, he took a flying spring that was as swift as it was unexpected.

He landed in Detective-Sergeant Ellery's chest. For a moment his arms were embracing his neck. Ellery swore softly, and, staggering back, cautioned hard into his companion.

The latter swore in his turn, reeled, and went down with a thud. Ellery sprawled on top of him as Tinker let him go.

In a flash, before either of the two official detectives could even start to pick themselves up, Tinker streaked across the courtyard and disappeared into the side-street beyond.

W

HEN the mysterious veiled woman started to enter the library of the murdered Dr. Arnold Floyd, saw the uniformed constable, and made to retreat, Sexton Blake took a bound from where he had been standing at one side of the window.

His hand fastened on her arm, and in spite of her frantic struggles the famous detective dragged her back into the room.

"Just a moment!" he urged. "We want to know who you are, madam, and why you were seeking to see Dr. Floyd in secret at midnight?"

She ceased to struggle, realising that escape was out of the question. Martin had closed the window and planted his back against the casements.

Her breath was coming and going fast, her bosom heaving tumultuously as she faced Blake.

"May I ask what business it is of yours?" she demanded, in a pleasingly husky voice, which Blake felt he had heard somewhere before.

"It is the business of the police to know; I am working with them," the detective told her. "It is their concern to find out all there is to find out regarding Dr. Arnold Floyd and any person connected with him, in view of his having been murdered to-night."

"Murdered!" She started back from him, and he sensed that, behind her heavy veil, her eyes were startled, incredulous. "Murdered?" she repeated. "Is this really true?"

"Yes," said Blake.

And then the woman suddenly collapsed into the nearest chair and started to laugh. Blake caught the note of hysteria, and shook her by the shoulder.

"Stop it!" he ordered sternly. "You will realize that, under the circumstances, you will be compelled to disclose your identity," he said, as her overwrought laughter ceased. "Won't you raise your veil?" he requested, more sternly.

"I suppose I may as well."

With a quick movement, it was done. Blake and the others saw the pale but beautiful face of a fair woman of about thirty.

"Adrienne Page!" Sexton Blake murmured. "I should have known from that famous husky voice of yours, after watching and listening to you in the new show at the Frivoli. May I say that I enjoyed your acting more than any I have seen for years?"

"Oh, what does my acting matter? What does anything matter now?" she asked, turning her head aside, as her lips quivered. "I suppose my coming here at midnight will have to come out."

"Not necessarily," put in Inspector Martin. "If you are open with us, Miss Page, we might be able to leave you out of anything in the way of this sort of publicity. Why did you come?"

"I had an appointment to see Dr. Arnold Floyd at midnight."

"For what reason?" asked Blake.

"Think I refuse to say. So he is murdered!" She showed signs of hysteria again, and was plainly the prey of almost uncontrollable emotion. "I would have murdered the wretch myself if I had possessed the courage. I am glad—glad!"

Her eyes fell on the damaged safe. She started.

"You have forced that open, then?" she exclaimed, catching in her breath and losing the traces of colour that had returned to her cheeks.

Blake looked at Martin questioningly.

As he learned that masked intruders were responsible, and that the contents of the safe had been stolen, Adrienne Page looked on the point of swooning. But she recovered with an effort of will, and waved away the glass of water Blake attempted to place to her lips.

"What—what type of criminal do you think ransacked the safe?" she faltered. "Just ordinary burglars?"

"There is the possibility that they were blackmailers," said Blake, and the woman sprang to her feet with a cry.

"Then it's all up with me!" she moaned. "The wedding will not take place," she quoted,

with a twisted smile, sinking back into the chair, the prey of despair.

"Just what do you mean, Miss Page?" asked Blake. "Come, be frank with us. Police officers are usually pretty good fellows, and can be discreet. If you will take us into your confidence, we may be able to aid you. And you possibly will help us considerably in the clearing up of the mystery surrounding Dr. Floyd's death. I, by the way, am Sexton Blake, the private detective of Baker Street."

She seemed to consider. When she glanced at the constable, Martin sent him back to the hall. Adrienne Page looked up suddenly, her beautiful face full of resolution.

"I will tell you," she said.

FOR some years, Dr. Arnold Floyd has been bleeding me white—blackmailing me. Of late—since he learned that I had become engaged to be married to Lord Keeler—he has been putting on the screw.

"I was to have married Lord Keeler in two days' time. I have no money left. Even my 'wedding' has gone to satisfy the toll of the inhuman villain you tell me is now dead. I was to see him here at midnight to-night, and he had demanded five thousand pounds under pain of telling Lord Keeler what he knows about me, and preventing the wedding. I couldn't raise as many hundreds, and I came to plead with him to show some spark of mercy if he was capable of that."

She shuddered.

"At first I thought I might be saved when you told me he was murdered. Now the position seems rather worse—if other blackmailers have rifled his safe. They will no doubt levy their own impossible demands on me before the day after to-morrow. As I simply cannot pay, Lord Keeler will have to know."

"To know what?" asked Blake. "Possibly it isn't half so bad as you have allowed yourself to think."

"I paid at the time for what I did," Adrienne Page said bitterly. "The name I use now is merely a stage name, as you may have guessed. My true name is Amy Graham, and as a young girl I was sent to prison."

"On what charge?" Blake inquired.

"I was working as a cashier in a store. I embezzled two hundred pounds to loan my brother, who was the secretary of a slate club and that amount shot in his accounts. He had a young wife and an ailing child. I thought I could replace the money in time, but the auditors came in earlier than I anticipated, and I—well, I was sent to prison."

"Why not tell Lord Keeler this?" Blake suggested.

"I'll shock her head."

"If you knew him, you would be aware that he is of the old school of aristocrats. Anything in the nature of scandal is abhorrent to him. He has never known what it is to be desperately in need of money. He would not understand. No, no! If he learns the truth I could not face him. I should offer him his freedom."

Once again Blake and Martin's glance met. The actress had given them very valuable information.

So Dr. Arnold Floyd had been a blackmailing, too, and somebody—possibly the Haynes—had hijacked the evidence he held over his victims. That Adrienne Page was the only one was unlikely.

"Martin," said Blake, "how close has the police surveillance upon Julian Haynes and his wife been of late?"

"We've tailed 'em on and off. That is to say, that when one or more of our men have been slack, the Haynes have been shadowed on the off-chance of getting something on them."

"Not to-night, then?"

Martin shook his head.

"They weren't kept track of. Nor was the girl, Estelle Morrow. Have been pretty busy at the Yard."

"Why," gave them their chance to pull the safe—keeping here if they were the culprits, as I believe," mused Blake. "Hallo, who's this, I wonder?"—as the bell of the telephone rang.

Martin answered it. His brow darkened as he listened.

"You're to be complimented, Ellery!" he snarled sarcastically. "What are you to do? Why ask me that? Try to pick them all up, of course!"

He banged the receiver down and snorted irritably.

"It was that swollen-headed idiot, Ellery!" he announced. "He picked up Tinker in ragged clothes at the hotel where Estelle Morrow was staying. Oh, you needn't look concerned! Tinker handled the inefficient lot all right—jumped on him and sent him down in the mud and beat it."

"There were four of them covering the chance of Tinker going to the girl's hotel. The two men who went to her rooms through the hotel chased after him, and she ducked them."

"You mean that—"

"I mean they concentrated on Tinker, and overlooked that they might find out his future plans by questioning her. When they got back to her room she was gone. Ellery thought he might pick her up at the Haynes' flat, near Battersea Park. He found every sign that everything personal had been hurriedly packed and that they'd quit in a hurry, too."

"That's interesting," said Blake. "And this is where Miss Page can help us."

"I dare not do anything against the new people, who may try to blackmail me!" the actress exclaimed, shaking her head. "Apart from what they might do in the direction of Lord Keeler, I have to think of my professional reputation. I cannot—simply cannot—have it come out that I am really Amy Graham, the one-time woman convict!"

"Miss Page, that shall not come out. You have my word," Blake assured her. "Come, wouldn't you feel safer if you could know that these pests were put behind bars on another charge altogether?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"Then please do as I say," pressed Sexton Blake. "Either personally or through some messenger, they are almost sure to approach you to-morrow—the day before the date fixed for your marriage with Lord Keeler—to try to extort a large sum as the price of their silence. What is your private address?"

"No. 5, Pelham Road, St. John's Wood."

"Very well. You have a maid?" And, as she nodded, "Then there is a simple signal, which I want you to agree to give. Let your maid show out any innocent visitors you may have."

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blackmailers, accompany that person to the front door and show him or her out yourself."

"When they communicate with me it might be at the theatre."

"You will be engaged and unable to see any visitor who will not openly state his or her business. You will send word out to any such person to call upon you at your house. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"And you will do it?" persisted Blake.

"At a moment of hesitation, the actress inclined her head."

"I promise."

"She was allowed to go by the same way that she had entered. College raised an inquiring eyebrow. He did not see the need to be ungratefully. He did not see the need to be ungratefully."

"If you're right, Blake," said Martin, "your arrangement with her will probably enable you to pick up the Haynes."

"And Estelle Morrow," added Blake. His eyes held a hard gleam for a moment. "Because of something I have seen since I have been back in this room I have a very good idea of how to come up with Miss Estelle Morrow," he added grimly.

INSPECTOR MARTIN was for leaving now and sealing the room. Blake, however, appeared reluctant to go.

"He could not see how any clue could have been missed. But Tinker's liberty, even his very life, might depend on his establishing just what had happened here when Dr. Floyd had met his end."

Blake intended to be thorough.

He began to walk slowly around the room, while Martin fidgeted impatiently.

Blake left not an article unexamined. He inspected the books in one set of shelves and eventually reached those built against the wall facing the french windows.

There, in the shelf almost on a level with his eyes, the volumes were sparse. There was an unfiled blank of about a foot, and the dark green wallpaper at the rear of the shelf had become curled up at a join.

Blake's keen eyes saw that it was slightly nicked. He raised it with his long, white index finger. Then, with an unvoiced excitement in his throat:

"Come here, Martin! I want you to see this before I touch it," he said.

Suppressing a tired yawn, Inspector Martin joined him. Blake was again holding up the loose corner of wallpaper. Behind it there was a hole in the plaster, and embedded in that cavity was something dark and of a metallic character.

"By Jove! A bullet!" Martin jerked. "The murderer fired twice at Dr. Floyd, and missed him with one bullet, by the seem of things."

"It might have happened like that," said Blake, busily using his pocket-knife to pry out the bullet. "Here it is! Humph! Looks like '23 calibre."

He carried the bullet under the light and examined it through his powerful pocket lens.

"Nothing at the moment," he announced. "Slip that into an envelope, Martin, and note where it came from. This might be a valuable clue. Well, I think we may as well leave now."

"Tinker has a light gun of this calibre," said Martin, almost gloomily.

Blake nodded. That particular automatic had been out of order, and Tinker had taken it to some gunsmith to be repaired. But who the gunsmith was, or whether his assistant had called for the weapon and had it back, Blake did not know.

"Where would the bullet that killed Dr. Floyd be now? At Kensington Police Station?" asked Blake, when he and the inspector were climbing into his car.

"Yes. It's bound to have been extracted by this time."

"We'll look in there," said Blake, and turned the car the required way.

The bullet lay on the local inspector's blotting-pad. A glance showed Blake and Martin that it would fit a .25 calibre gun. Blake took it from under his thumb and finger and turned it over under his lens.

"Hallo! Rising marks here look different from those on the other bullet all right!" he exclaimed.

"That proves very little—in fact, nothing," said Martin. "We've found out Dr. Floyd was a damned bad egg. Some exasperated or desperate dupe of his might have tried to kill him on a previous occasion, and fired the bullet in the wall weeks or months ago."

"A matter of opinion, my friend. If a badly disposed person fired a bullet at you and it missed, wouldn't you have the curiosity to search for where it went and to dislodge it?"

"I might. But he might not have found it. Beside, men's natures are different."

Martin jerked pig-headedly.

"Floyd would be more likely to remove it than the average person. If the servants found a bullet in his wall, they would certainly talk—and he would not want that."

Sexton Blake dropped Martin outside St. John's Yard. Then he drove to Blake Street and garaged his car. As he crossed the road to his house, a short distance along the street he saw two dark figures emerge from the shadows. The men peered hard at him, then again disappeared into themselves.

The watch for Tinkers was not slackening.

Blake was conscious of the complete silence of the house as he made his way to his consulting-room. A great loneliness stole over him when he entered the room.

At any other time, Tinker would have been up and waiting eagerly to hear the result of any investigation he had been engaged upon.

Blake moved with an infinite sadness about the room he and Tinker had worked in for so many years. There were many little personal belongings of the young detective lying about, and more than one Blake picked up mechanically with an ache at his heart.

Suddenly he clenched his hands. He believed he was beginning to see daylight and that he could clear Tinker if only the young fellow him-self would emerge from his stubborn silence.

In any case, he thought, he had got to get some sense to freshen for the morrow, when he hoped to be able to make definite moves in his assistant's interests. He went to his room and turned in. But Blake had been too optimistic.

For the first time in years, he found sleep eluding him. He spent a restless night, and at dawn after seven o'clock the next morning he rose and dressed in sheer impatience, looking worn and weary-eyed.

He felt disinclined for breakfast, and set out to walk to St. John's Wood.

The fresh air gradually had him feeling more his alert self. Blake was more or less normal when he found Pelham Road and quickly located No. 8.

By great good luck, directly opposite was an empty house with a "To Let" board displayed in the front garden. The latter possessed a bit of a hedge, and Sexton Blake slipped in at the gate and took up his stand behind the bushes.

Then began one of the most harrowing and wearing waits of his career. He was

thankful for the forethought that had prompted him to get some sandwiches out before leaving home and to bring them with him in his pocket.

It was not until the afternoon that he caught a glimpse of Adrienne Fage. She left her residence on foot and returned after an hour with several parcels, suggesting she had been shopping.

When dusk was falling, Blake saw a bulky man in chauffeur's uniform approach the house, though there was no car in sight. He turned in at the gate, and the detective saw him admitted by a trim maid.

The fellow was in the house for upwards of twenty minutes. Then Sexton Blake saw the front door opening again and stiffened. Yes, the actress herself was showing the man out!

He was a messenger from the persons who had rifled the murdered doctor's safe.

The chauffeur swung off down the road. Directly, Blake told him, and had to exercise all his skill in shadowing. Continually the man had hot fustive glances back over his shoulder. Had his pursuer been anybody but Sexton Blake the chauffeur would certainly have realised he was followed.

He turned in at the Metropolitan Station. Blake had become a distance between them by this time, and entered after him. It was as he did this that a rather flashily dressed man, idling near with an evening paper, took stock of Blake over the top of it. He started, hesitated, then almost rushed to a telephone booth—and thus missed seeing that, if the chauffeur was being followed by Sexton Blake, Sexton Blake was also being followed by somebody else who would have immediately recognised also.

It was a trunk call that he made. After a short delay he spoke sharply, eagerly, into the instrument.

"You know you told me to keep track of Simon just in case he was picked up at the house in St. John's Wood and talked. Well, he is being followed, and"—he sank his voice to a lower key—"it's S. B. himself who's after him. What am I to do?"

"Nothing!" came the reply, after a delay suggesting that the person at the other end of the wires had been thinking. "I'll arrange to have Mr.—er—S. B. attended to when he reaches here."

The tone was grim and ominous. The flashily dressed man grinned evilly, and signed with relief as he hung up.

Sexton Blake and his quarry were by this time in an east-bound train. The chase led to Liverpool Street Station. Blake was not near enough to the chauffeur to hear him speak to Sipping-Crouch, and himself fought a tickle.

Some quarter of an hour had to elapse before the train was due to leave. Blake slipped to the telegraph office and scribbled a wire, which he dispatched. After that the chauffeur and the detective travelled in adjoining compartments on a train that seemed to crawl.

Considerably over two hours later, Sexton Blake found himself groping through darkness after his man, who was clinging to the river-side.

At length, in a forlorn and lonely spot, Blake made out the dim shape of a solitary house standing near the water's edge. There was no moon, and he only knew that the chauffeur had entered the place by hearing first the click of the garden gate, then the slamming of the front door.

The detective crept forward, opened the gate inch by inch to avoid its creaking, and shut it again.

Without a sound after him. One window was illuminated, and Blake saw with a little thrill of satisfaction that the blind was ill-fitting.



Paid for
Five
Years

Up to it he glided. Leaning forward, he applied his eye to a chink at the blind's side.

It was to look into a plainly furnished sitting-room, where a slender girl was bending over a tweed walking skirt which she had lying before her on the table. A can of petrol stood near, and with a piece of rag she was apparently cleansing stains left by mud on the hem.

She turned her head a little. It was Kate Morrow.

Into Blake's line of vision moved two other persons; the burly man in chauffeur's dress whom he had followed and Miriam Haynes.

"So she put you off until to-morrow—the day of the wedding?"

It was Miriam Haynes who spoke.

By straining his ears, Sexton Blake was just able to catch the words, and he knew nothing of the sinister shape which had detached itself from some near-by shrub, and which was now tiptoeing noiselessly towards his back.

"Yes," the chauffeur nodded. "But she faithfully promised to have the money within half an hour of the bank opening to-morrow and the marriage isn't till one o'clock."

It was then that the dark figure behind Sexton Blake leaped like a cat. The man's arm whirled up. Blake whipped round. In the dim light from the window, he caught a glimpse of the savagely twisted face of Julian Haynes.

The detective had no chance. Something crashed down on his head with a shattering force that caused blinding lights to flash before his eyes. Blake's knees sagged under him; he went down, and for the time being remembered no more.

"Hold that, Sexton Blake!" snarled the attacker over his prostrate body.

"You sent me to five years of hell!"

WHEN Tinker brought off his lightning getaway from Detective-Sergeant Ellery and the other Yard men, he made his way by a circuitous route to a cheap lodging-house, not far from Wardour Street.

Anxious to Get in Touch

The one-eyed proprietor of the doss-house was an Italian, who could speak just as much—and just as little—English as suited him. As long as he was paid for a night's lodging, he was not accustomed to ask questions. And, anyway, having once been convicted of larceny, he hated the police.

Tinker risked going out early in the morning, and mechanically he turned his steps towards Baker Street, though he knew well enough that, for him, this was a danger zone.

He was thinking of Sexton Blake, his friend and benefactor for years. Deep down within him was an urge to get in touch somehow with his chief, apologies for the wild words he had used the night before, and to take Blake fully into his confidence.

He did not dare to phone, however, for there was every possibility that Blake's calls, both inward and outward, would be tapped by the police.

Tinker was passing a newsagent's when his glance fell on the large-printed banner-head of a news item, in a newspaper folded and hung in a wire rack in the doorway:

"MURDER CHARGE AGAINST SEXTON BLAKE'S ASSISTANT."

The words hit Tinker like a physical blow. He pulled himself together and drew the ragged tugged peak of his dilapidated cap over his eyes, peering into the shop.

Behind his counter the newsagent had his back turned. Tinker nipped in, dropped a penny on to the counter, and was gone with a

morning paper by the time the man looked round.

He looked even more grave when, in a side-street, he had digested what appeared under the headlines on the front page. There was a dramatic account of Dr. Arnold Floyd's murder written up in a star reporter's best style. The wording regarding himself was guarded, but obvious as to its meaning.

And from one of the columns Tinker's own photograph looked back at him. There was a statement that he had disappeared and that he was wanted by the police for the slaying of the doctor.

Tinker began to know the nerve-tensing sensations of the hunted criminal.

"I've got to go mighty carefully or I'll be rounded up within the hour," he told himself.

It took some courage to go on to Baker Street. But he reasoned that, though a formal watch would be kept near Blake's house, this was about the last thoroughfare in London where the police would expect to find him.

From the same passageway—approached from back streets—in which he had discarded Mrs. Bardell's clothes, Tinker located the two Scotland Yard men keeping an eye on the front of Sexton Blake's house.

Then abruptly he saw Blake himself. A side-door giving into the yard of a house stood ajar. He dodged in, waited until Blake had passed, then followed him at a discreet distance.

Tinker did not risk approaching him in the vicinity of his home. There was always the possibility that Blake would be tailed in the hope that he would lead the manhunters to him—Tinker.

In this way, Tinker shadowed Blake to St. John's Wood. He actually saw him take up his watch in the garden of the empty house. Tinker was behind a milk-cart at the time.

He grew puzzled. It was obvious that Blake was beginning a vigil of some sort, and Tinker was reluctant to join him now in case he put whoever was Blake's objective on their guard.

There was just a little touch of pride about it, too. He hadn't quite made up his mind yet to try to patch matters up with Blake. Again, Tinker rather feared to tell his chief the truth—that the girl he was shielding had confessed to the shooting of Dr. Arnold Floyd.

At length Tinker became so hungry that he left in search of food. In a coffee-shop he chose the gloomiest of the tall-backed old-fashioned settees, and breathed an ejaculation of fervent satisfaction when he realised that the untidy girl in spectacles who served him was somewhat short-sighted.

He was drawn as if by a magnet back to the road where he had left Blake. There he killed time, though not sure whether his master was still secreted in the garden of the empty house or otherwise.

With the coming of dusk, Tinker saw the





brood-shouldered man dressed as a chauffeur enter Adrienne Page's home opposite. When the fellow left, Tinker watched Blake go after him. He trailed after the pair, in his turn, still wondering just what Blake was really doing.

Tinker clung doggedly to the chase, though he had many uneasy thrills on the way. As far as he could, he kept his distance from policemen. For all that, he hardly passed one without feeling that the man was staring at him suspiciously.

Every other pedestrian seemed to do likewise. Tinker heaved a sigh of relief when, having said "Same" not far behind Blake at the booking-office at Liverpool Street and received a ticket for Spivingou-Crouch, he found himself in an empty third-class compartment.

But the greatest heart tremor had yet to come.

When at long last the slow train pulled up at Spiving Station, and Tinker alighted and made for the barrier, he saw a uniformed policeman push past the outgoing passengers and stare sharply at him.

It was a twinkling, Tinker darted behind a pile of luggage. He was not to know that a little girl belonging to one of the porters had been knocked down by a car and had her arm broken, and that the local policeman was here merely to acquaint the railway employee with his daughter's injury.

"Did you hear me?" shouted Haynes. He struck the helpless Blake in his gagged mouth. "You've sent men to the gallows; now you yourself are going to hang!"

The constable lingered, and all the passengers who had alighted from the train passed from the platform, including the chauffeur and Sexton Blake. Then the porter whom the constable wanted appeared from the lamp-room. There was a further delay for Tinker while the two men conversed animatedly together.

Tinker naturally did not know what to make of it when, after they had spoken to the stationmaster, the police officer left with the porter. It was some time before Sexton Blake's assistant risked emerging from his cover.

When he did so, and approached the barrier with his ticket in his hand, his heart was pounding like a sledge-hammer. Had the constable really gone, or would he find him waiting outside?

Tinker drew a long breath, and handing his ticket to the collector, who had been about to take himself off, he passed into the street.

The policeman was no longer in sight. Tinker was just making sure of that, and congratulating himself when a car came to a halt almost in front of him and the door was flung hurriedly open. A bulky man sprang out—and Tinker abruptly found himself face to face with Detective-Inspector Martin, of Scotland Yard!

For the instant the hustled detective and the high official of the police were so taken aback that they could only stare at one another blankly. Then:

"Tinker!" Martin bellowed, just as his

assistant, College, started to emerge from the car at his heels.

Martin made a grab. Tinker eluded it with a quick and a sverre. He wasn't ready yet by any means to talk. He had got to get away.

He ran, hearing Martin starting to pound after him as he did so.

"Come on, College! It's Tinker!" he heard the detective-inspector shout. "Stop, thief!" he howled, with a snort of anger, as he saw that Tinker was fast outdistancing him.

Into the Spiving High Street Tinker thudded. The local constable and the porter were just ahead of him. Both turned at Martin's cry. The policeman made a spring.

He must have been mightily surprised, but he attempted to put a jujutsu hold on Tinker. Before he knew where he was, he was himself rendered powerless by another. He went reeling; his helmet fell off, and he sat on it in the gutter. Tinker dodged the porter and shot down a side street leading to the river.

At the water's edge he raced on through the confining darkness. He heard shouts and the pounding of feet close behind him. Dimly he saw tall rushes not far ahead. They gave him an idea that was as resourceful as it was desperate.

Tinker dropped to his hands and knees. With hardly a sound he slipped into the water. It was deeper than he had thought, and closed over his head.

It was key, but that he had to put up with. When his head cleared the surface, he left his mouth and nostrils just clear of the water and kept himself thus by clinging to the rushes.

His pursuers were almost at the spot.

CLASH

"STAND on your feet, you snooping rat, and wake up to what's going to happen to you!"

To Sexton Blake the harsh voice of Julian Haynes seemed to float from afar. His senses were only just beginning to drift back to him. His head felt as if it were splitting.

Keen-edged knives seemed to be stabbing through and through his temples.

Detained

In a dim kind of way, Blake realized that it was very dark all about him, and that he was not only bound hand and foot, but gagged.

Somebody was heaving him upwards in strong arms, and at first he thought a part of his bonds had slipped when he felt the rasp of a rope against his throat.

He heard the monotonous lap-lap of water. Next he found that it was no displaced rope touching his neck. About it a rope was tied tightly, and as dizziness seized him and he sagged in the hold of the man who held him, the grip tightened. It was tied in a no-knot.

"It's too dark for you to see very much, my dear Blake," sneered the tones of Haynes, and the detective understood that the blackmailer was near, after all, and supporting him. "Let me explain the position to you."

He laughed softly.

"I suppose you thought I took that dose of penal servitude as just the luck of the game, eh? Well, I didn't! Every day I was in that purgatory of the Moor I swore I would make you pay for it. But I didn't expect anything so lucky as having you walking right into my hands."

"I had to hide in a toothed for a time, as I didn't want the girl to know what I intended or that you had even reached our hideout down here. She heard you fall when I hit you, and she came out to see what the noise was. But you are here now—where you are owing to me! Partly to pay off our old score, Blake. Partly because you are taking an interest in my affairs that might have become dangerous to me."

Blake naturally did not make no reply, because of the gag. He waited to hear more, knowing that his captor meant every word he uttered.

"You are standing in a boat moored under an

old jettie that isn't used once in a blue moon," went on Haynes. "One end of the rope above you is tied about a beam. The other is slip-knotted about your neck, Mr. Blake. When the tide ebb—and it is just on the turn now—it will . . . But I need hardly outline to one of your quick intelligence what is going to happen to you."

Sexton Blake had more than his share of courage, and when he had commenced his career years back he had fully realized that eventually he might meet his end at the hands of some ruthless criminal whom he had sought to track down.

But he would not have been human had not a little thrill of cold horror run through him now. To die from a bullet or a swift knife-thrust was one thing; this was quite another.

As the tide dropped, so would the boat in which he stood, until it left his feet altogether and he died a torturing and lingering death from the noose that would tighten and tighten under his weight round his neck.

"Did you hear us, you devil?" shouted Haynes, all his lungs emptying black smoke. He strait the helpless Blake in his gagged mouth. "You've sent men to the gallows. Now you yourself are going to hang!"

"Don't make such a row!" somebody warned from the darkness. "If you've fixed him, come away!"

The hunt swayed under Sexton Blake, dragging the noose tighter and causing it to bite into the flesh of his throat. The rope was so taut now that he could not look down. But he sensed from the sounds that Haynes had got into a second boat, and presently he heard it being moved from under the jettie.

The splash-plash of oars continued to thud back to Blake from out of the clinging gloom for nearly a minute. Then a few sounds died into nothingness, and all was silent.

The boat under his feet was not moving a great deal. He reasoned that it must be moored at either end to keep it in position. But it was slowly but surely sliding lower. Haynes had noticed when he had said the tide was on the turn.

Sexton Blake rose on tiptoe to relieve the strain on his windpipe.

But already the rope was so taut about his neck that he found difficulty in breathing. Soon the slight respite given him by his raising himself on his toes was negligible. The tide appeared to be sinking with an alarming speed.

Blake mouthed at his gag. He tried to shout for help, but only an inarticulate gurgling passed the red band which had been thrust into his mouth and latched in position.

He craned just a little more on to his toes. The rope was strangling him. No quick, merciful hanging, this; it was slow, cruel suffocation.

His brain began to swim. Grimly, he told himself that he had got to keep his senses and his upright position. If he collapsed it would throw all his weight on the slip-knot and be as good as the end of him all the time that he managed to keep alive there was hope—perhaps.

But who was likely to come upon him here in this desolate and deserted spot?

His thoughts went to Tinker. The sadness that had been on him all day increased a hundredfold. That they should quarrel and have the one break in all the years of the companionship now—now, when unless some miracle happened, he was facing eternity.

The rolling of his head returned reddened. A blood-red mist floated before Blake's eyes. The noose was now dragging at his neck. His toes barely touched the inexorably sinking boat. Something seemed to snap in his brain. His legs sagged under him, and there was a roar

like rushing waters in his ears. He was beaten, at last.

"HOLD up, guv'nor! For the love of Mike, hold up!"

Blake knew something of that agonized cry that came out of the darkness as a boat ground against the side of that which was already leaving his dangling foot. Tinker, his face pale and working, allowed the oars he had used to fall into the water. He climbed swiftly from one boat into the other, got an arm about the inert Blake, and did his best to support him while he groped frantically under his ragged overcoat for a penknife in his jacket.

Tinker found it. He opened it with his teeth, saved with the blade at the rope above Blake's head.

At last it parbed. A dead, unconscious weight, Blake sank down into the bottom of the boat, dragging Tinker with him and setting it lurching.

With trembling fingers, the young detective sought the noose about Blake's neck. For the moment he could not gain a grip on it; it was so sunk into Blake's flesh. But then Tinker managed to grip and loosen it.

Still cold with suspense, he searched Blake's pockets in the hope that his neck had been left to him. It had. Tinker clicked on the light and shone it on his master's face.

It was deathly pale, but not discolored. Tinker chafed Sexton Blake's hands, after making sure that he still breathed.

It seemed minutes before Blake stirred. He opened his eyes and blinked in the light of the torch.

"Tinker!" he whispered hoarsely.

He found Tinker's hand and pressed it. The young detective felt him there, not urging him to talk, letting him recover his faculties in his own time. There was no other way more effective he could do.

But Blake's recovery was not long delayed. He was, except for a soreness of his throat and neck, practically himself again in a few minutes.

"It was Julian Haynes," he said, looking at the telegram from Liverpool Street. He acted on that. That's all."

"And as I'd seen you were at work and had shadowed you down here, I hurried right into Martin. I understood now, added Tinker.

"I've even been in the river to dodge him and College, and others. I thought I'd shaken them off when I heard them approaching me again. I ducked into the boat and they went back the way they had started to come. I was just going to slip out and make off when I heard another boat being rowed past me."

He suppressed a shudder.

"A good thing I was quick on the uptake," he added. "Somebody in the other boat laughed and said something about the newspapers having another sensation when 'they had him under the jettie.' I knew you had trailed that chap dressed like a chauffeur down here, and I got nervous. I started to ask for 'the jettie,' and I found it—thank Heaven!"

"Let's get ashore!" urged Blake. "I have a little account to settle with Mr. Julian Haynes."

He did not speak again until they were on the bank and making their way upstream. Then he dropped a hand to Tinker's shoulder.

"You must know a lot of that sort of stuff here and let the police hunt you, Tinker," he said quietly.

A cry escaped his assistant.

"Do you know?" he asked unguardedly. "Eh? Shut that up, Tinker, swiftly. 'That's all honey, guv'nor. I—'"

"It isn't anything of the sort!" snapped Blake. "She had your cigarette-case in her handbag last night. I know, because a fingerprint was accidentally brought up on it in some white substance. That white substance was face powder that had been spilled in her bag, or I will never make another deduction."

His fingers lightened on Tinker's shoulder.

"She probably picked that case in the room where Floyd was murdered. If she didn't, tell me how she did it there—if you can."

"She didn't plant it!" Tinker cried. "Chief, will you promise not to do anything too harsh if I tell you what really did happen? I wanted to tell you. I've tried to get near you to tell you."

"It's hard to give such an assurance. But I'll promise to keep my eye on all the while that you are not in actual pressing danger from the law."

"Then listen!" urged Tinker. "She went to Dr. Floyd's house last night to try to force him to give her something he had in his safe. What it was, I don't know. But Estelle's white, guv'nor, and she wasn't after whatever it was with any crooked intention. She'd forced him to open his safe, with a gun I've got in my pocket now."

"What calibre is it?" interrupted Blake.

"A .25."

"Go on!"

"Well, he seemed to kick in. He opened the safe. Tinker grabbed a gun he had in there on a shelf and turned it on Estelle, ordering her to drop her weapon. She stumbled over a tiger-skin rug and her gun went off by accident and killed him."

"And your cigarette-case?"

"I'd forgotten that for the moment. I'd lent it to her, and the smokes in it, because she'd run out of cigarettes. Her bag fell open, and the case wasn't there until she had been left behind then. Chief, we've got to end some way of getting her out of this horrible jam!"

"I wonder if we can?" mused Blake. "There is just a chance—judging by something I found last night—who was with her when Floyd met his end?"

"Nobody that she mentioned to me. But she didn't have time to tell me more than the last part before the police were after me."

"Do you know that she has been running around with the Haynes? Don't fly into another temper, young man. That's the plain and unvarnished truth."

"I don't know that," Tinker muttered. "I'll admit she's a bit of a mystery. But she's asked me to trust her. And I've got to go."

"Sh-sh!" warned Blake. "We are getting near the house the Haynes have down here. They are."

He broke off. They were passing through a patch of deep gloom between trees. Three figures sprang out on them, and one wore the uniform of a constable.

"Up, guv'nor, up, Tinker!" rapped another of the newcomers, and the tones were those of Martin. "I've got to detain you—"

"LL give you no more trouble, sir," said Tinker, making no effort to elude the hand Martin clapped to his shoulder.

"I think," put in Blake, "that if you stay with us, Martin, Tinker may be able to get away. You and I are at the house just ahead? The Haynes are there, with Miss Morrow."

They made their movements noiseless. On to the house they went. Outside was parked a small car, the one which had been there since

(Continued on page 24.)

With his back to the wall, his gun ready in his hand, Kennedy glanced over his shoulder. He had just stopped playing. "Kennedy walking round at night with a cool million," he was saying "it's too easy!"

TO
REMIND
YOU—

THE interest which certain well-formed circles in the underworld were displaying in Sanctuary Manor, was evidenced in the three murders which quickly followed the passing of Haddon, former owner of the manor and dope king. Kennedy had left a million pounds in Sanctuary Manor. Where exactly only his step-daughter, Marion, knew. Knowing how he had amassed his money, she refused to touch it, but she was determined that no crook should get it either, and was, therefore, pleased to welcome the assistance of Bill Kennedy, from Scotland Yard.

Kennedy had arrived, partnered by Jim Haddon, from New York's police bureau. Bill knew about the million, knew the danger that threatened Marion, and hoped to protect her, and to clear up the mystery of the White Rider at the same time.

The White Rider—a masked horseman who rode at night—had figured in the mysterious activities round Sanctuary from the first; his identity had yet to be solved. Meantime had occurred the murders: Brandbridge, a London "fence"; Henderson, one of Kennedy's men; and Chatham, a scientist-recluse. Chatham had long been acting on the orders placed to him by a secret "boss." And then, despite instructions "to leave the girl alone," he had kidnapped Marion and attempted to get the secret of the money from her by torture.

The Rev. Theophilus Gregory had rescued her. For a country parson, Gregory was showing surprising interest and activity in a crime mystery. He got Marion to promise to keep silent about her rescue. She had not recognized Chatham, as he had been masked.

Then Chatham called at the manor—and was stabbed. It was time, Kennedy decided, that further attacks were drawn off Marion, by getting her to hand the million over to his keeping, and Marion agreed to this. Since Peter Loutrange, final possible suspect in the tangle of mystery, had capped his declaration of love for her with a reluctant confession



The WHITE RIDER

By
Leslie Charteris

Bill Kennedy is Surprised.

MARION nodded to the detectives.

"Would you pass it over, Mr. Haddon?" she asked coolly. "The money, I mean."

Haddon started.

"Pass it over?" he stammered. "Where is it?"

"You can reach it from where you're standing."

Jimmy Haddon stared round him. He was standing with his back practically opposite the door concealed in the panelling, and both the pedestal with the statue of Venus and the bookcase were within reach of his arm. He looked at the girl, inquiringly.

"Which book?" he drawled.

"No, not there. Try the pedestal—or, rather, the statue."

The American picked up the statuette and weighed it in his hand.

"It's light," he observed. "Do I smash it?"

"Give it to me!" she commanded imperiously.

Haddon passed the statuette over to her. Marion took it and turned it over in her hand. Then,

holding Venus head downwards, she took a safety-pin from her dress and pressed the point into one of the eyes. With a click the base sprang open.

"Heck?" Haddon gasped.

Marion put her hand into the cavity and drew from it a shining steel cylinder which she tossed over to Kennedy. The base of the statuette clicked shut again.

"You might put this back again," she suggested calmly, and returned the statue to the American.

"By Heck?" Haddon murmured again.

Bill Kennedy was still staring at the metal cylinder.

"The top unscrews," Marion said. "Inside there's a million pounds in banknotes—one thousand pounds each."

"By George, that's smart!" Kennedy's hand came down with a great thump on the table.

"Where's the safest spot for an escaped convict to hide? Right inside the prison he escaped from. Where was the safest hiding-place for this fortune? Why, right where nobody would look for it—right in the gadget that opens the very hiding-place where it ought to have been hidden?"

Jimmy Haddon turned and made a low bow before an unbelieved Venus.

"Well," he drawled, "you had your day, madam. Huts off to the most valuable bit of marble the world has ever known!"

HALF an hour later an ambulance and a doctor arrived simultaneously.

"My name is Munroe," observed the medic. "Is there anything I can do?"

"You can write a certificate," Bill said.

"And then you can make yourself really useful."

As the ambulance assistants uncrowded the body the doctor's face lost a little of its fresh colour. But then the average country G.P. is not called upon to deal with murder cases.

Bill turned to his assistants as they were bearing Chatham away on a stretcher.

"Leave him as he is," he directed. "I'll be over to-morrow. There'll have to be an inquest." As they departed, Haddon stared after them and said, "Ha! I want his head sewn up, too, if you've got the utensils."

"Miss Fenton told me there was something of the sort to do," Manners remarked. "I know her quite well. Is she all right, by the way?"

"Quite."

Bill sat down and began neatly addressing his soiled package, while Haddon changed his bandage and the doctor laid out surgical needles and gauze.

"This ain't what you'd call a healthy spot," Haddon said, coolly lighting a cigarette, "with the aerid stinging of iodine all over the place. That hombre was only the third. If I hadn't leant forward just as our unknown friend struck, I should have made a fourth."

"I've heard rumours, of course, but I didn't know how much to believe. Do you mind leaning back and resting your head over the top of the chair? Thanks. What is the motive?"

"Money," Bill answered, inscribing LONDON in neat capitals on his package, and underlining it with a flourish.

"It often is," commented Manners.

It occurred to Bill that this chatty little man might assist the spreading of the news that anybody who wanted to pick up a million pounds cheap should apply to him for the name of William Kennedy, and not, as heretofore, to Miss Marion Fenton. He took the cylinder from his pocket and plunked it down on the table.

"One million pounds," he murmured, and the doctor nodded.

"And is there anything in the White Rider story?"

"Lots."

"I want to catch that Rider," Haddon interposed. "Some time when you're not around, Kennedy. A quarter of an hour later he'll be black and blue Rider, and he won't be a mystery any longer."

"That's the best move," Kennedy agreed. "Catch the Rider, and the whole boiling thing's over, but the shouting."

Manners released Haddon's head, and started to renounce his lug.

"Is that all I can do, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Exactly all, for to-night, thanks. I'm afraid you'll be wanted at the inquest, but they won't

keep you long. You'll just have to roll out to court and depose that you found Mr. Julius Chatham very mysteriously dead, and roll out again."

For nearly two hours after the doctor had bled off, Bill Kennedy and Jimmy Haddon sat up discussing the manner in which the White Rider should be caught. And at length Kennedy rose to his feet and yawned.

"I'm going for a stroll round," he said. "I shan't sleep to-night—not with this hair cash in my fingers."

"Going for a walk round in the dark with all that money on you?" demanded Haddon in amazement.

"Even so, laddie. See here," Bill thrust both hands into his pockets. "I'm holding the coat with one hand, and a little toy that you call in America a put in the other. The put is loaded, the safety-catch is off, and my finger's on the trigger. Anybody wanting to practise a little quiet thuggerly on me this evening is in for the thinnest of thin times."

"Well, I'm coming with you."

"Thanks—but you're not, all the same. I've phoned Scotland Yard for a spare man, and I want you to hang around till he arrives. He'll see Inspector Peters, and he'll look twice the fool he is. I'll be back in about half an hour. So long!"

He strolled out into the garden via the french window. He was interested in the noise which had drawn Durham away to the farther end of the estate, but not particularly interested for the simple reason that it didn't require a cast-iron guess as to who had caused it. And, in any case, there wouldn't be any point in ferreting round in the dark. So he merely stopped to give Durham a few brief instructions, and strolled down the drive.

Half-way down, Durham caught him up again.

"I forgot to mention it, sir, but ever since that noise, I've had an idea there was someone in the alshery opposite the library window."

Bill swung round.

"Did you see anything?"

"Well, sir, your eyes play you queer tricks at night, but once or twice I've thought I'd seen a shadow move when it didn't ought to have."

"Ought not to have," is the phrase you want," Bill corrected gently.

"Yes, sir, but when I got there, there wasn't anything to see. But all the time I had the idea whoever it was, was just dodging me."

"That's all," Bill interposed coldly.

"No, sir; only I thought you ought to know."

"Well, now go back. Your shadow, if you aren't dreaming, will probably elect to follow me now. I shall be a whole lot interested to know."

He added in a louder tone, "whether a soft-soled 32 bullet'll make the same size hole in a shadow as it makes in a man."

"Very good, sir."

"Right." He often look after myself, Durham. But you must keep an eye on Mr. Haddon. He's inclined to doubt his danger, and two fatalities in the same night would be rather heavy going."

"Right you are, sir."

Bill went on down the drive, rather less happy than when he started. A soft-soled 32 would do some good as a last resort, but as a man, granted it were aimed true, and the awkward part was that one always had one's back to remember. However, he reflected, one could be shot through the library window just as well as out in the garden—in fact, better, since the lighting would be all on the side of the assassin.

He found his steps were taking him towards the same attic inhabited by the vicar and Peter Lestrangle. The vicarage was in darkness, but a light shone in the window of Lestrangle's study, and he made his way towards the sound of music came to his ears as he drew near.

Presently, with his back to a wall as a precaution against attack from the rear, he was able to see in. His gun was in his hand, ready.

HIS field of view included Peter Lestrangle, still attired in his dandling flowered silk dressing-gown, and, to Bill's surprise, the Reverend Theobald Gregory. Peter was playing the "Traumerei."

Presently he stopped, and, leaning round in his elegant cigarette case, he said:

"Kennedy—that wise old bird—walking round at night with a cool million in his pocket," he murmured. "It's too easy!"

Bill ran his thumb over the exact outline of his automatic, and reflected that anyone who

determined to put that apparent easiness to the test would have a severe shock.

Gregory was drawing on his cigarette finally and without much enjoyment, like a woman.

"It looks easy," he agreed, "but he's probably got at it."

"Where's Haddon?" Lestrangle asked.

"Still at the manor. I heard Kennedy asking him to remain. Apparently Kennedy is expecting the superintendent of his unbrotherhood, to wit, an Inspector Peters. Have you ever heard of him?"

"I have?" not I believe he's Kennedy's favorite assistant."

Gregory nodded again.

"He will have to be reckoned with."

"I never reckoned with anybody under the rank of superintendent," Peter replied gravely.

"You're sure Chatham is dead?"

"Positive, my dear sir. He died quite suddenly. I fear he will be feeling somewhat—ah—surprised by this time."

"Splendid, Steven! We're getting on." He turned again to the piano, and strummed a few rippling chords, while Gregory, under the rank of superintendent, was left to his own devices.

"I don't think he believed me. What they need at Scotland Yard is a panel of doctors—mental cases."

The watcher outside flushed darkly. Lestrangle played half a dozen bars of "Annie Laurie"; and, in spite of that, he commenced to improvise cheerfully.

"Oh, Wilkins's brass are bonnie, but he never feeds off nothing; He's just a rubberneck."

"He's just a rubberneck."

"In Mister Kennedy's."

"And to lay his hands upon the Rider. He would lay his hands down and die."

"Just a rubberneck, am I?" thought Bill Kennedy. "Well, even rubes are things sometimes."

Inside, as the tune ceased, Peter looked up.

"Not at all," protested Gregory. "Please go on. I only wish I could secure your services for the organs."

"Oh, by no manner of means, padre. I'm an artist, and I've got a temperament. After about twenty minutes of sacred music I should get for up and down the stairs."

"Beside, I'm not a Christian. Would a public devotion regard all this destruction walking around us with my exequiary? Or yours, for that matter, Steven? And d'you know there are two ways of singing 'John Peel'?" he added inconsequently.

"What are they?"

Again Peter played, and this time he sang also, in a lulling, rollicking refrain:

"D'ye ken John Peel with his coat as gay,
D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day."

and so on to the rousing finish.

"Or like this," Peter sang, and he sang the same words, but in a rich baritone voice that had almost exactly the same effect as the other.

Outside, Bill Kennedy stood spellbound, for he had never believed that that old chorus could be sung with such magnificent feeling, so that it almost made him jump come to your tingles. And then the music died and the spell was broken, so that Peter Lestrangle laughed lightly-heartily.

"You see?" he said. "That's temperament. And I really do think Chatham was inimitable. He stood in the way, so he had to go. Was he a great loss?"

"It is not for you or me to judge," replied Gregory, "but I think it was."

"Exactly. And therefore it's too late to worry," Gregory nodded.

"What about the detectives?"

"Not useful," Lestrangle dismissed the entire police force with two words and an easy shrug. "Kennedy barks a lot, but Haddon doesn't bark. I'm not worried about Kennedy, but I am worried about Haddon. Do you think he had better go?"

"I should wait," Gregory counselled.

"I might as well wait," Gregory replied.

"I could have stage-managed his exit so beautifully," he murmured. "However, perhaps you're right. Haddon is reprieved for a day or two."

He lighted another cigarette from the stump

SOLUTION TO THE "LIFT MURDER."

(See page 2.)

[This is set upside down in order that you may not inadvertently read the solution before the problem.]

When you found Mr. W. H. Haddon in the room, you found him sitting on the bed, and he was looking at the door.

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